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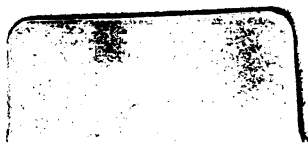
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*"His lectern was a shelf of carved rock"
"A Holy Virgin and more Holy Babe his listeners."*

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THE HOLY CHILD

OR

THE FLIGHT INTO EGYPT

BY

THOMAS E. VAN BIBBER

NEW YORK AND LONDON

G. P. PUTNAM'S SONS

The Knickerbocker Press

1887

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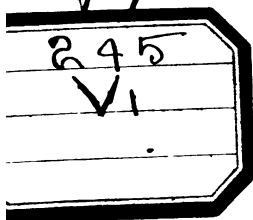
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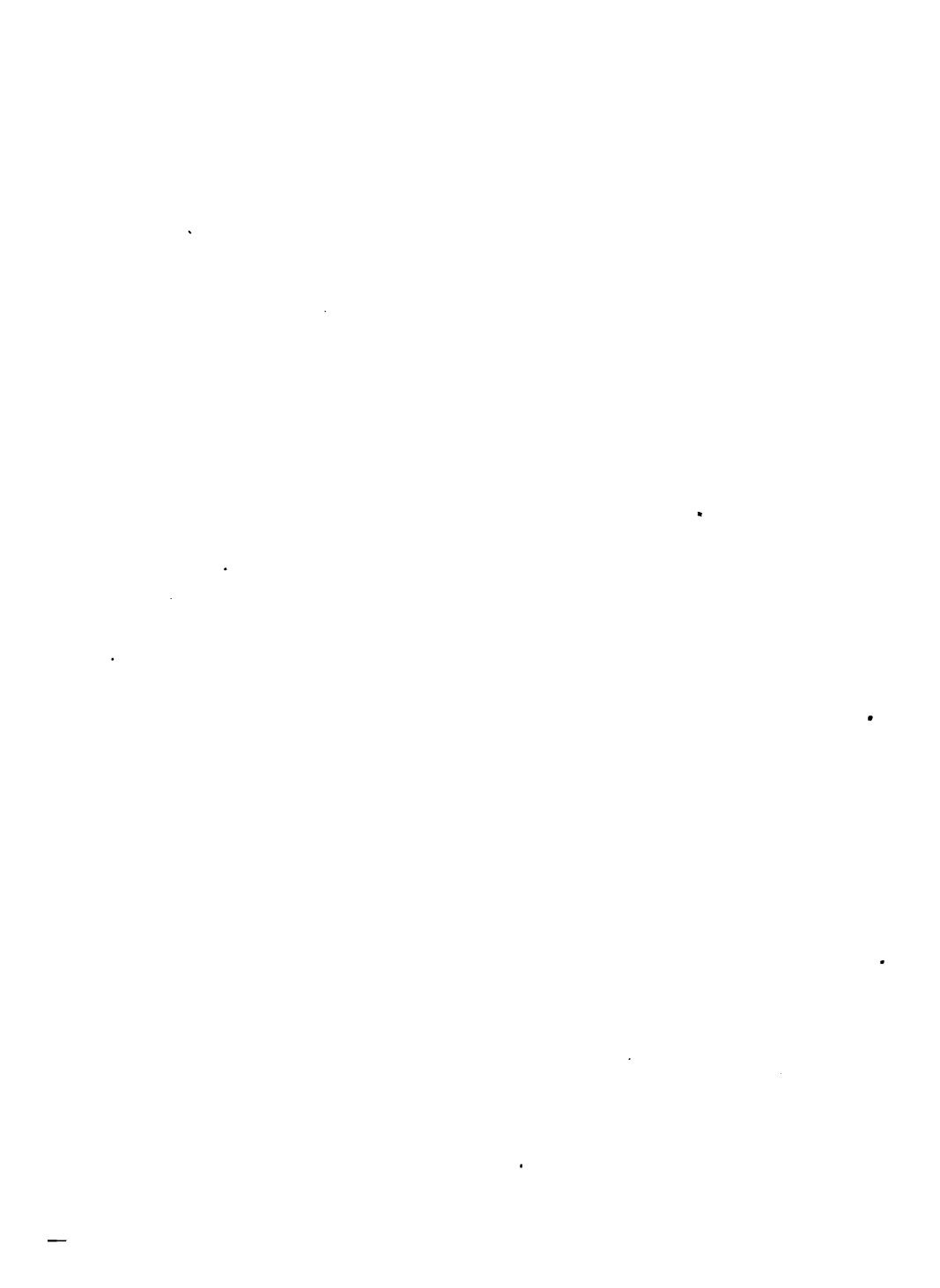
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DEDICATION
TO
W. C. VAN BIBBER, M.D.
OF
BALTIMORE

PERMIT ME TO DEDICATE THIS POEM TO ONE WHO HAS ALWAYS BEEN TO ME THE
TRUEST OF BROTHERS—BOTH BY TIES OF BLOOD AND BY NEVER-CEASING
ACTS OF FRATERNAL AFFECTION





TO THE READER.

A portion of the following Poem has already appeared in print. But in order to add the conclusion, which was left by the author in manuscript, and to make the narrative unbroken and continuous, the earlier volume has been so abridged, and the additions constitute so large a part of the present work, as to make it essentially a new one.

Readers of "Ben Hur" will probably be struck with certain resemblances in scenes and incidents in the Poem, that may appear to have been suggested by that fine prose work. It is therefore proper to state that the manuscript was completed long before, and a fragment of it published simultaneously with the publication of "Ben Hur."



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BOOK I.

HOLY LAND—THE FLIGHT.



CANTO I.

THE FLIGHT COMMENCES.

A WAKING Vision of the Flight to Egypt !
To view heaven's orbs by daylight, men
were wont,

In olden times, to visit some deep well,
Or the dusk crypt of some vast pyramid,
Whence, looking up, they could, through one small
opening,

Behold the stars at noon, and e'en descry
The pole-star's culmination. Thus may we,
Dim-sighted, from the glare of common day,
Enter the shadowy Cave of Waking Dreams,
And kneeling reverent on the marble floor,
Behold, through one small opening—O the joy!—
The star of stars, the star that leads to Christ.

A Waking Vision of the Flight to Egypt !
Come, listen : though the words be poor and weak,
Weak and imperfect, like all earthly things,

The VISION, if heaven-born, may glimmer through
them,

As sinking sunlight gleams through some old oak.

Full eighteen months had passed since Christ was
born,

Most of which time was spent at Nazareth,

The home of Mary and the foster-sire.

Then Joseph and the Mother of the Child,

As was their frequent custom, paid a visit

To their relations in the hill-country.

Whilst there, the Angel of the Lord appeared

To Joseph in a dream, and said : " Arise,

Take the young Child in haste, and take the Mother,

And, fleeing into Egypt, be thou there

Until I bring thee word ; for Herod seeks

To take the young Child's life."

Joseph arose,

Obedient to the messenger's command,

And journeyed on toward Egypt.

Night was coming ;

The new moon, thin and small, could scarce be
seen ;

It seemed a silver sickle, edgewise viewed,

Soft melting in the sunset's golden glow,

Like pearl melting in wine. All night the stars,
God's brightest thoughts addressed to human eyes,
Rose in the east, and sank below the west,
In clustered constellations wonderful.
The Northern Cross sloped o'er Judea's hills;
Job's Coffin hung, as if self-poised, o'erhead;
The Sickle glittered with its starry curve;
And, lovelier still, fair clustering down the west,
The silvery Sisters Seven, o'er Rachel's tomb
Seemed mourning for their lost one.

Paths obscure,
And unfrequented ways, they first pursued,
Lest Herod's all but bloodhounds, all unleashed
And rabid for the scent of human blood,
Might follow on their footsteps. A long journey,
A drear and perilous journey, lay before them;
Danger in front and dangers in the rear,
And many a weary waste of desert land.

So on they journeyed, hushed, but fast at first,
Afraid to whisper much above their breath,
Threading small, tortuous, sheep-tracks, wild and
rough,

By many a silent vineyard, many a grove;
Past olive gardens, grain fields, ancient oaks;

Past mountains, caverned into antique tombs ;
Past slumbering villages, whose inmates lay
Couched on the house-tops, Oriental-wise,
Soft dreaming, sweet asleep beneath the stars.

At last they reached a mount whose lofty brow
Was overshadowed by a branching grove
Of terebinth ; which, having passed, behold
Before them in the dark what seemed a vale,
With streamlet in the midst and hills beyond.

“ Behold the vale of Elah,” Joseph said,
And pointed with his staff. The Virgin looked ;
But all seemed dim and shadowy to her eye,
Veiled o’er by shrouding night.
Sudden, an instantaneous pulse of light,
Unlike all other light, from fire or sun,
From glowworm, planet, or enchanted lamp,
Streamed, wave on wave, in undulations strange,
O’erflowing the horizon’s utmost rim.

It was indeed that memorable vale
Where, more than ten long centuries before,
A shepherd lad, with staff and sling and bag,—
A rosy boy, fresh from his father’s flocks,—
Had gathered five smooth pebbles from the brook,
Wherewith to slay the giant.

The Virgin gazed entranced. Her full, large eyes,
Swimming in liquid rapture, gazed around,
Taking in either mountain, at a glance,
And all the windings of the brook, which now,
For lack of rain, was shrunk within its channel,
With wave-worn stones and pebbles overheaped.
Those pebbles had been swept, by many a flood,
Down from the neighboring mountains on each side,
And, where the stream was fullest disappeared.

But that strange light ! Scarce could the Virgin
tell

Which most to wonder at, the mystic light
Itself, or the weird scene it shone upon,
Bringing out every object into view,
And giving each a beauty not its own.
To her it seemed as though the glorious bow
Around God's throne, the rainbow of high heaven,
Were melted into radiance pearly white,
And having fused its seven hues into one,
That one were streaming on a snow-white dove,
Whose every wing-flap sent a wave of brightness,
In undulating currents, round the globe.
Nor was that all. She heard, or thought she heard,
At intervals, a fine unearthly chime,—

Caught only by the spirit's inner ear,—
Which marvellously seemed to sink or swell
With the light's ebb and flow, and to embrace,
In full harmonic unity, each tone,
Each melody, conceivable by man,
Into a sevenfold twine of woven sound,
Which sometimes seven-fold seemed, and sometimes
three.

As when, in early spring, a throng of clouds
Sweep hurrying overhead ; some silver-edged ;
Some streaked by pencilled beams, which radiate,
Spoke-like, all streaming from a central point
(That point close-clouded, centre of the wheel) ;
Some shaped like floating turrets set adrift,
And all, in endless sequence, casting down
A host of racing shadows o'er green hills ;—
Such, and so masque-like, was the throng of thoughts
Which drifted o'er the Virgin's fresh young soul.

Joseph, who had been kneeling, rose and cried
In solemn utterance, quoting from the Book :
" God said, let there be light, and light there was."
Then long and deep he gazed upon her eyes,
As though all heaven were mirrored in their orbs,
Heaven behind heaven, in far perspective view ;

He gazed on her ; she on the Primal Light.
And on they passed o'er that old battle-field,
Until they reached the brook. There Joseph stooped,
And from the smooth white stones reposing there
Gathered an egg-shaped pebble, water-worn,
And, save for its suggestions, little worth.
" Doubtless 't was much like this," he, musing, said,—
Holding the smooth stone in his outstretched palm,
And lapsing into meditative smile,
Half quaint, half reverent,—“ much like this, I ween ;
Picked up, it may be, from the self-same spot,—
A thing like this—a plaything of the flood—
A bauble for a boy to sling at birds.
No wonder that Goliath laughed to scorn,
At first, the slinger and the thing he slung.
Yet, in my inmost heart, I do believe ”—
And as he spoke an earnestness profound
Deepened his tones, and flushed his manly cheek—
“ That He ”—he pointed to the Heavenly Babe,
And bowed, and reverently clasped his hands—
“ That He, the manger-cradled, cattle round Him,
Will, in due time, confront, and do to death
An Anakim ten million times more dread
Than he whom David slaughtered with a sling ;—

Nay, with a thing of simple, common use.
A simple word, or two, The Word,—no more,—
Shall work such wonders, through all coming times,
That future generations without end,
In ever new developments, shall grow,
And grow, into more rich and perfect bloom,
Until Humanity's full-blossoming flower,
Never full blown, but always blossoming,
Shall be transplanted into heaven's high fields,
And mix its odors with the flowers above."

So saying, he tossed the pebble back. They three
Traversed the channel of the shrunken stream,
And as they journeyed on, might be compared
To holy thoughts, in penitent human souls,
Calm moving on where storms have left their mark.
A Holy Family journeying through the night !
Two human, One both human and divine ;
The foster-father faithful, good, and true ;
The Virgin Mother all-immaculate ;
The incarnate God in budding infancy ;
All Three mysteriously linked in love,—
Love such as angels scarce can comprehend !

The humblest things of earth oft shadow forth
In some sweet way the ineffable things of heaven,

And lowly plants, trod down by cloven hoofs,
And browsed by cattle, show to pious eyes
The mystic symbols of a higher life.
Then pardon me, I pray, if I compare
The Holy Family, that trinal group,
To something noticed in our daily walks.
Wander some summer morn adown the meads,
Or o'er the pastured hills, before the dew
Has by the sun been quaffed ; you chance may spy
A three-leaved clover, with a delicate ring,
Or mystic circle, curving o'er the leaves,—
So curving as to form a perfect round.
'T would seem almost as though Divinity,
To write its gospel underneath our feet,
Had chosen this small plant, and had impressed
Upon the embryo leaflets, ere their birth,
This symbol-form, most perfect of all forms ;
Each leaf, though separate, bears its segment due,
And all combined compose the rounded whole.
So far, each seems to bear an equal share
Of the divine. But, of the three, should one
Have on it a small drop of common dew,—
A common dewdrop, loveliest thing on earth,
A tiny globule, like an opal-stone,

Or like one of those strange, oracular gems
Which shone of old upon the high-priest's breast-
plate,

Self-luminous, outsparkling, all aglow
With the Shekinah-glory,—that one leaf,
Though fed by juice from the same earthly root,
And bearing on its face the self-same mark,
Outshines them all.

Then, as the three went calmly journeying on,
The Virgin thus, in meditative mood,
Expressed her thoughts aloud :

“ O what a night !

I thank thee, my Creator, for this night.
The very danger adds a zest to joy.
Those stars above us seem not common stars ;
This earth we tread on seems like a new earth ;
That tuft of palm-trees, waving from afar,
Fans the bland air like trees of Paradise ;
And, more than all, this strange, delicious light,
So softly penetrant, so crystal clear,
So fringed with faintly-tinted stellar rainbows !

“ See how the infant Saviour scans the stars ;
How his innocent eyes are fixed aloft !
Perhaps this wondrous light may come from him.

But once before, once only, did I see
Such light; it was the night that He was born.
And hark these strains from yonder distant hill,
Where shepherds watch their flocks!—the same, the
same!

The song the angels taught them on that night!
I thank thee, my Creator, for that song—
Glory to God! O glory in the highest!
On earth be peace, and good-will toward men.”

Some moments paused the travellers, to hear
That pastoral anthem floating 'round the hills,
That echo of a song composed in heaven.
And when, again, the chorus pealed from far
With one accord, then, Joseph and the Virgin,—
One sinking to a deep and manly bass,
The other mounting, lark-like, silver-toned,
Hand clasped in hand, and voice with voice com-
mingled,—

They joined the shepherds in that song of praise,
The whilst high heaven's golden portals opened,
And such a stream of harmony august,
Commixed with voices high angelical,
Pealed downwards through the peopled orbs of space,
In unison with music of the spheres,

That the whole universe, through all its breadth
And height, and depth, grew tremulous with joy ;
And, as the diapason rolled along,
Those heaven-sweet words could still be heard
through all :
Glory to God ! O glory in the highest !
On earth be peace and good-will toward men.



CANTO II.

AMONG THE SHEPHERDS.

DESCEND we now from these empyreal heights,
Where human spirits dare not linger long,
And liken what has faintly been described
To things, though earthlier, easier to conceive.

As in that fairy city of the sea,
For its Rialto famed, and Bridge of Sighs,
Whose streets are waves, whose wains are gondolas,
Two centuries ago, on moonlight nights,
Two gondoliers, at fitting space apart,
Sang, in alternate strophes, loud and clear,
But sweetly pensive, Tasso's epic song,—
Chanting of battles fought in Holy Land,
And how Jerusalem was won,—how won
The tomb of Christ, with how much toil and blood;
If, then, in midst of their responsive notes,
All of a sudden some sweet chime of bells,
Or sacred carillon, from neighboring church

Or campanile—church quick answ'ring church,—
Rung far and wide, the charm was all complete.
Still stood the wanderer on the airy bridge ;
Thronged were all balconies, and every barge ;
Each pinnace, floating o'er the rapt lagoon,
Seemed spellbound by the music.

For full two hours they journeyed without halt,
Ever ascending ridge on airy ridge,
Till, through a cloven opening in the crags,
The road wound downward. Huge top-heavy cliffs,
On one side, rose, sky-high, above their heads,
And, on the other, yawned a dread abysm,
Through which a mountain torrent chafed, and
moaned,

As if half mad, half doleful. “ Pass of Death,”
The peasants round had called it in their fear.
Chill night-winds sang their requiem through its pines;
Owls hooted ; serpents hissed ; and jackals howled ;
Whilst, from the highest precipice aloft,
Down to the lowest boulder, earthquake-wrenched,
A darkling horror brooded, night and day.
A narrow mule-path wormed the dizzy side,—
Where one false step were death. With shuddering
fear

The wanderers entered in that dolorous gorge,
But, when the mystic light, which shone before,
Illumined them again, their hearts were cheered,
And both burst forth into that holy psalm :
“The Lord my shepherd is—I shall not want,”
Which he, and Mary, in alternate chants,
Sang, passing through “The Valley of Death’s
Shade.”

Another hour of travel brought them to
A little band of shepherds, on a hill,
Who chanced to be the same that, on the night
When Christ was born, were first to hail their Lord.
From hill-top on to hill-top they had roamed,
In search of pasture, ever moving south ;
Until, with all their flocks, their kith and kin,
They reached the far-famed ancient border-land
Near Hebron, which Patriarchs dearly loved.
At once they recognized their Saviour-Lord,
And gathering 'round, with shepherd's staff in hand,
They worshipped Him, again, on reverent knees ;
Among them, a father, son, and son's son :
One, with long locks besprinkled thick with gray ;
Another, with black hair, and raven beard ;
The third, with hazel ringlets clustering round

His roseate cheeks, his chin as smooth as girl's.
Thus David may have looked, when yet a lad ;
And, to complete the likeness, the boy bore
A sling and staff, and on the harp could play ;
Zadoc his name ; beloved wherever known.
O how his eyes were fasten'd on the Child !
How oft he clasped his hands, and bent his knees !
How tears chased smiles across his lovely face !

Now, when they heard the cause of Joseph's flight,
They marvelled much. At last the father said :
" Here you may rest secure. Zadoc, conduct
The travellers to the chambers in the rock."

Zadoc obeyed, and, at a watch-fire near,
Lighting a pine torch, led them down a path
Which wound 'mong lonely hills, and reaching, soon,
A cavern's mouth, from which outran a stream
Of purest water, guided them along
From chamber on to chamber, up and down,
By sparry column, and 'neath fretted roof
(Stalactite and stalagmite touching hands),
Until he reached the last, and largest, room
Of all those broad apartments,—circular
In form, with high-arched dome for ceiling. There,
Couched on a mossy bed, fragrant with flowers,

And aromatic mountain herbs, there lay
An old, old man, father of that old man
Who watched the sheep outside. An opening through
The centre of the dome let starlight in,
And smoke of torchlight out. Asleep, 'mid flowers,
There lay the hoary Patriarch, with smooth crown,
And silvery beard and side-locks ; wreath of snow,
He seemed, fresh fallen on flowers ; wreath doomed
to melt,
And vanish soon from earth.

Perhaps aroused by touch of some sweet dream,—
Perhaps by Zadoc's torch,—perhaps transpierced
By that soft penetrant and primal light
Which shone before the moon or any star,
The old man started to his feet, and stood,
Bolt upright, gazing, raptured, on the Child,—
With arms stretched forth, and long beard stream-
ing down,
His eyes aglow with second-sighted fire,—
And cried aloud : “ Hail ! Day-spring from on high ! ”
Then, on his knees he fell, and clasped his hands ;
Zadoc, beside him, kneeling with his torch,
And Joseph looking on with wondering smile,
Whilst the calm Virgin, folding to her heart

The Infant Jesus, heavenward gazed, and prayed.
Then Joseph took the torch from Zadoc's hand,
With gentlest touch, and, stepping to one side,
Dipped it within a cistern standing near ;
Whereat the effluence of that Other Light
Outstreamed with unstained splendor, filling all
The caverned rooms, the limpid spring, the dome,
The old man's shining crown and silvery beard ;
And raying upward through the lofty dome,
Like an inverted cone, whose base was heaven,
Added to all the stars within its cirque
A super-stellar lustre. " Wonderful !
Can this be heaven indeed ? How beautiful ! "
Said the old shepherd, sinking on his couch
Exhausted by the shock of ecstasy,
And lapsing into sweet Elysian dreams,
From which he never woke in this lone world.
But Zadoc knew not the old man was dead,
And still with pious tendance, from a basket
Heaped fresh and fresher sweets upon his limbs.
With other mountain herbs and flowers he spread
Another couch beside the caverned fount,
Where, in soft, fragrant coolness, with the Child,
The Virgin slept ; while Joseph, at her feet,

Wearied with toilsome tramping through the night,
Sank from a heaven of dreams to slumber blank.

Early they started on their morning journey.
The Patriarch, they supposed, lay sweet asleep,
And Zadoc, too, all prostrate, on his face,
As though, whilst kneeling, he had lost his poise,
And so had sunk to slumber. "Better thus,
Than roused before his time," said Joseph, softly,
And led the Virgin from the silent cave.



BOOK II.
HOLY LAND.
(*Continued.*)



CANTO I.

A BLESSING FROM INFANT LIPS.

OUTSIDE, all things were rousing into life,—
Cocks crowing, cattle lowing, singing birds
Astir on every tree-top,—fresh'ning airs
Shake ev'ry leaf, and, whisp'ring with soft breath,
Called on the sun to rise above the hills.
The ass they find still tethered on the mead,
Where he had browsed, some hours, on dewy grass.
Joseph had loved the morning all his life;
His many years had faded not his bloom,—
Had spared the blush-rose carmine of his cheek.
One would have taken him for a guileless man,
Core-sound in soul and body, through and through,—
A man whom all men trusted,—true as steel.
His broad, high forehead seemed the dome of
thought,
And rose above his sanguine-tinted cheeks
As some pure marble temple, round at top,

Rises, at eventide, above a stream
On which the blood-red clouds have cast their glow.
High self-command, that crown of all that 's good,
Strong in his youth, and strengthening year by year,
Moon-like and cold itself, and chastely pure,
But, like the moon, brimful of subtlest power,
Now governed all the current of his blood.
His trade had passed with healthful influence
Into his brain and heart, and helped to feed
Them both to greater purity and strength.
The carpenter, like the mason, makes his tools
(Or he may make them if he will) his types,
His emblems, and the loadstars of his life.
The compasses, and that which they describe,
The plumb-line, the chalked cord, the rule, the saw,
The gimlet, auger, broadaxe, hatchet, plane,—
All these, could they but speak, would tell a tale,
Enforcing or imparting some great truth,
Which, moving from the workman's hand to heart,
Like sap from root to tree-top, would inform
And fill the whole with vigor, life, and light.
Nor is this all; the brain is often tasked;
The man must form exemplars in his mind,
Unseen, before the outward work appears;

Must calculate, must measure, must forecast,
Must strive to fathom numbers' wond'rous laws,
The laws which govern geometric forms,
And mastering them, unconsciously imbibes
The deep and holy teaching they contain.
And so it was with Joseph; his good trade,
Firm following nature's plan, had fashioned him
In symmetry complete, inside and out,
To manhood's finest type.

He had worked, in youth,
With many hundred skilful artisans—
His friends and compeers some, and strangers some,
On the new temple which King Herod built
To God on Mount Moriah. Few could there
Excel him in design or execution!
And none, with quicker insight, could embrace
The general plan, or master the details;
So that, henceforward, to the end of life,
The whole fair structure, with its outer walls,—
Its various gates with all their names,—its courts,
Court above court, with numbered steps to mount,—
Its altars, for burnt-offering or for incense,—
Its brazen sea, its lavers, and its fountains,—
Its Holy Place, with all that there belonged,

And all the various Temple furniture,
Hung like a living picture in his mind,
Warm, life-like, vivid.
Often, with eyes firm closed, or in the dark,
These images, with all their hidden meanings,
Rose to his soul, like visions from the sea,
Beheld by prophet or inspired seer,
Until his spirit, like a hallowed fane,
Became aglow with consecrated thoughts,
And his words streamed like incense.

Such had been
His wont, while still a workman in the temple,
And when his thoughts and fancies all were shaped
By what he wrought on. Since then higher views
Had dawned upon his soul, a holier Star
Had risen. Visions heavenly sweet he had
Of a Celestial Temple,—not of wood,
Nor stone, nor built by human hands,—of which
The first was but a shadow, soon to pass.
Hence all the later branchings of his soul
Were brighter than the first, and nearer heaven.

The sun had scarcely topped the eastern hills,
Which spread their lengthened shadows o'er the
land,

When, passing through old Hebron's northern gate,
They gazed with wonder on that antique town,
Where, full two thousand years before that morn,
The Patriarchs, when the giants were destroyed,
Lived happy lives, and where they left their bones.

One half the town seemed wide-awake, the other
Just waking, or still sunk in dreams. They passed
The pools, or springs, the smaller at the north,
The larger southward. There they paused a time,
To mark how up and down its fourfold stairs
(One stairway at each corner, each furnish'd
With one and thirty steps) the water-carriers,
With many a jocund shout and many a song,
Saluted, as they passed, and hailed each other.
Stout, brawny men were some, herdsmen, mayhap;
Others, fair, delicate damsels, mostly veiled,
Graceful in motion, springy in their tread,
And all as blithesome as the morning air.
One, with light yoke, on which two buckets hung,
Went tripping down the steps like a gazelle;
Another, graceful,—draped and closely veiled,
As well became an Oriental maid
Of modest port,—came slowly up the stairs,
On her head adroitly balancing

A bellying water-jar, full to the brim.
This last, beholding Joseph standing there,
Stepped, timid, up, and bending on one knee,
And holding forth a silver cup, thus spake :
“ Good father, thou dost seem a stranger here,
Born, mayhap, far from Judah’s mountains ; take,
I pray thee, from thy humble handmaid’s hand,
A cup of cooling water—trifling gift,—
Water which Father Abraham of old
Oft tasted in his time—so says the Book ;
For which small favor all I ask, my lord,
Is simply thy kind blessing.”
Then Joseph took the cup, and raised his hands,
And blessed her once, twice, thrice—then passed the
cup
To Mary, who first gave the Child to drink,
Then drank herself.

Joseph’s great heart, like green Gerizim’s mount,
Gushed forth with springs of sweetest kindness,
With no bare Ebal frowning opposite
For curses foul to lodge on. Not because
He hoped the blessing might be blessed to him ;
From selfish motives free, he had called down
From heaven a benediction on the maid.

The founts of his benevolence were fed
From veins deep-seated and forever flowing,
Which freshened all around him. But, behold!
What he had least expected came to pass.

Gazing with large-eyed love on Joseph's face,
Behold! the Child has raised his dimpled hands,
And smiling with a smile half arch, half grave,
And prattling on, as babes are wont to do,
In half-articulate accents, heavenly sweet,
In imitation of his foster-sire,—
Behold! with uplift hand and sun-bright eyes,
The whilst on high a sudden rainbow comes
And goes, and halos play around His head,
HE babbles, lispingly, HIS blessing too.

He blessed his foster-father, then the maid.
Thus she received a double benison,
Blessed by the holy man, and by the Babe.
Such twofold blessing blessed her through all time :
One like an unseen chain enwound her heart,
And thence was borne, on wings of spirit-dove,
Up to God's throne : the other, like a stream
Of heaven-electric fluid, flashed adown
The golden links, and thrilled her inmost soul.



CANTO II.

JOSEPH'S REMINISCENCES OF EARLY LIFE.

M IDWAY between the points of dawn and noon
The ascending sun had journeyed, quaffing
up,

The whilst he mounted, from ten thousand cups,
His morning draught of dew; the shadows all
Were slowly shortening; birds, heat-smitten, slunk
Within the wayside copses, having poured
Their early matins forth an hour ago;
And naught of dawning freshness now remained,
Save here and there, beneath some cool recess,
Long spear-grass, jewelled o'er with pearly drops,
Or overshadowed flower-bells, filled with tears,
Wept o'er the grave of morning.

Onward still,
Up hill and down, along a waving land,
Like to a wafted vessel sailing south,
The travellers, with undulations soft,

Rose and descended many a gentle swell,
Sweetly conversing, as they moved along,
Wrapt in fond memories of former scenes,
And Joseph thus narrated his past life :

“ Until my sixteenth year I had been wont
To aid my father in his husbandry ;
And oft, from sun to sun, with goad in hand,
Have followed the slow oxen 'round the field,
Holding the plow, and singing merrily.

“ Once—O how vividly that scene returns !—
The morning star yet shone ; the sun not yet
Had tipped Judea's mountaintops with fire
(It was in earliest spring), when, high o'erhead,
A flock of wild swans, like a wingèd wedge
In shape, went floating northward. Far away
They melted in blue space, and their strange song,
So musically wild, so spirit-like,
Grew ever faint and fainter, till it ceased.

“ It ceased, but not the wild emotions which
Upsprung within my bosom,—an unrest,—
A yearning to roam forth to distant lands.
'And O for wings,' I cried, 'to bear me on,
Buoyant, o'er land and sea throughout the earth !'
The field-flower died that day beneath my plow.

Unheeded ; dull, henceforth, to me appeared
A farmer's life,—dull as the clod he treads on.

“ My father read to me the book of Ruth,
And often spoke, in copious discourse,
Of the pure pleasures of a country life :
The ever-varying labors of the year ;
How sweet, at dawn of day, to smell the sod,
Fresh-turned ; how sweet to hear the lowing kine ;
How sweet the festive scenes of vintage-time,
The dance, the joys, the songs of harvest-home.

“ In vain ; on travel I was bent ; but as
Nor wings nor money were at my command,
‘ I will acquaint me with some useful art,’
I said, ‘ and, with my tools upon my back,
Will roam from town to town, from stream to stream,
From the broad western sea to Jordan's flood ;
From northern Hamath to the desert sands,
That stretch 'round Kadesh Barnea.’

“ In short,
With my dear father's hard-obtained consent,
I learned the craft to which I now belong ;
And, carrying out my plan of youthful travel,
I traversed, far and wide, the Promised Land
(The loveliest land beneath the eye of God) ;

Viewed Bashan's giant cities—standing yet ;
Slept on a snow-wreath, on the top of Hermon ;
And thrice the time the moon doth wax and wane
(Held by the wond'rous witchery of the spot),
On Lebanon's cool top I tarried ;—lodged,
Sometimes in open air, beneath the cedars ;
Sometimes with shepherds in nomadic tents ;
Sometimes with jocund wood-cutters, sleeping
In booths at night, and shouting all day long,
With axe in hand, among the cedar trees.
How the green giants crashed beneath our strokes !
Nor did I fail to visit, rapture-smit,
The threefold founts whence Jordan fills his stream.
Swift passed those years of happy wanderings.

“ At last, King Herod—partly to indulge
His love for building, partly to appease
His alienated subjects, Hebrew-born—
Resolved (as he said) to repair, with pomp,
The second temple, fallen to decay,
But (what was nearer truth) to build anew.
Forthwith, full eighteen thousand men 'gan work,
And worked for nine long years without a pause.

“ I joined their number. What a busy scene !
From many a land they came ; artificers

In wood, in marble, brass, and ivory,
In silver, and in gold, and precious stones ;
From Corinth, Athens, Rome, and Persia,
From Asia Minor, and Phœnicia,
And not a few from this, our native land.
All cunning workmen there found constant work ;
All working on a pattern pre-arranged,
Which was, as near as altered times allowed,
The pattern given to Moses on the Mount.
Slowly 'cumbering ruins were removed,
Slowly the costly edifice was reared.
Unlike the temple built by Solomon,
Which silent, dream-like, magical, uprose
Without the sound of hammer or of saw,
With Sabbath stillness, seven long, tranquil years.
This came to life with many a painful throe,
With clang of noisy tools, and voice confused
Of tongues and nations.

“ Round each stone,
Each marble slab, each cedarn beam, each shaft,
Each tessellated pavement of the courts,
Each portico, each golden gate, my heart
(I wonder at it now, since all is past)
Was twined with an affection so intense,

Almost it might be called idolatry.
'T is ever so, I think ; the builder's heart
Is blended with the structure which he plans
Or helps to rear ; as it ascends, his soul
Mounts with it, and his eyes behold, at last,
With rapture, the substantial thing, which once,
Perhaps long years ago, seemed but a dream.

“ In nine years, then, the fane was fit for use,
Though far from being finished in detail
Superior to Solomon's in size,
It lacked the glory and the sanctity.
Five things it lacked which hallowèd the first,—
The Ark, the Holy Fire upon the altar,
The Urim and Thummim, the Skekinah,
And the prophetic Spirit shrined within.

“ These things I note, lest what I utter now
Might much excite your wonder. One thing more :
Herod—who, of the erected pile, defrayed
The cost, and by whose order it was reared—
Has striven for years to heathenize the land.
He lacks all reverence for what Moses taught
By inspiration. His one god is self.
For selfish ends alone he worships Cæsar,
And to him rears those beauteous marble shrines

The which, with horror, I have oft beheld
Whilst journeying 'round the land. One stands near
Fair Paneas, hallowed fount of Jordan's stream;
Th' other in a town nigh the western sea,
Containing (shameful sight to Hebrew eyes)
Two statues, one of Rome, of Cæsar one,
And more. Has he not built without, within,
Our Holy City, two most cursèd piles,
In one of which foul pagan plays are mouthed;
And in the other (dreadful, horrid sight!)
Wild beasts, uncaged, are hissed on one another;
And captive gladiators, doomed to death,
Fight till the floor is flooded—grappling now
With lions, now (O butchery abhorred!)
Hacking each other's flesh with blood-red swords!
And then his games Quinquennial (how I loathe
The word!). And yet, not satisfied with these,
He needs must bring Olympic games and shows,
Mimes, boxers, dancers, acrobats, buffoons.
O these things thought of grieve me to the heart,
And almost cause me curse that sanguine fiend
(Possessed by two foul demons, lust and cruelty)
From whom we now are fleeing!

“ But, enough;

Words have no power to stay these poisonous woes;
God's power alone can crush them. To return.

“ At last those nine long building-years were run,
And that most gorgeous structure of the world,
Compacted of enormous marble blocks,
With golden spikes high towering o'er the roof,
Stood fit for use (though not as yet complete),
For still some scaffolding incumbered parts
Which needed yet the sculptor's farewell touch,—
Chiefly the eastern porch, called Solomon's.

“ Once, when at evening's close I wandered there,
Absorbed in meditations manifold,—
Some sad, some glad, all weighty in their scope,—
I, seized with sudden whim to mount aloft,
Climbed, by the aid of ropes and treacherous boards,
And stood upon the summit, all alone.
Gehenna lay beneath ; down, down, down,
So deep and black it yawned, in shadowy depth,
That Fancy, awe-struck, whispered : ‘ Mouth of hell ’ ;
And the hoarse winds that moaned along the gorge
Seemed laden with wails and screams of children,
Passing through fire to Moloch. Owls and bats,—
These, circling, 'gan to flit, and those to hoot ;
Dogs barked and growled o'er mangled carcasses ;

Whilst from a far-off barren mountain top
A pack of dol'rous jackals, hunger-smit,
Wailed on the muffled ear of coming night,
As if they strove to rouse Abaddon up
T' unsheathe his red death-sword, and let them glut
Their famished maws to full. Loud pealed, at
times—

Echoing from tower to tower—the watchman's cry;
With clang of bolt and bar the city gates
Were fastened; Kidron's brook, with torrent flood,
Swollen by recent rain, lifted its voice,
Dirge-like, commingled with the sough of pines
And cedars, mourning around prophet-tombs.
That hour all things terrific seemed and dark.
There, on the toppling height, I stood alone,
Whilst thought on thought rolled, flood-like, through
my brain.

“My nine years' work was done. I had been
raised

Above all carpenters collected there,
And for possession of superior skill,
Was called 'the master-workman.' Fir and pine,
Sandal and cedar, olive, shittim-wood,
All costly timbers, had been furnished me;

And I had fashioned them to fitting shape,
With thoughtful brain and careful hand, ever
Planning, devising, executing ; in
Singleness of purpose, what was destined
For ceiling, floor, or wall, for panel-work,
Or wainscoting, for ornament, or use.
Did I feel proud, and think upon my work
With inward satisfaction ? Till that night
I had done so,—until that moment rather,—
But now, a shadow darkened all my soul,
Blacker than that which, o'er the Holy City,
Was cast by ebon night.
Tears streamed adown my cheeks. ' Jerusalem !'
I cried, ' Jerusalem !' how many hearts
Cling to thy walls—the hills—with love intense,
But chiefly thee, Moriah, highest mount,
Site of God's temple, highest, holiest mount !
To thee, in distant lands, thy wandering sons,
Whether as exiles driven from thee far,
By the Great River roaming—or by Nile—
Beneath the shadow of the Pyramids—
Under terraced Babel's weeping willows,
Though rivers, mountains, deserts, intervened,
To thee, soon as the hour of worship comes,

All eyes, all hearts, have ever turned, devout ;
As though the worshipper believed, and felt,
That his warm prayers, however winged with faith,
Could never reach the ear of the Almighty,
Unless they rose conjointly with the smoke
Of sacrifice for sin. For thee, 't is said,
The Faithful Father of the promised seed,
With fire, and knife, and sacrificial wood,
Came with intent to slay his darling son.
Not far from thee lived Salem's peaceful king,
Priest of the Most High God, Melchisedec ;
From yonder mountain's side, perhaps, he marched
To meet the Patriarch, victorious
From battling with the kings, and rich with spoil ;
Not far from thee, perhaps, he offered him
The mystic bread and wine, refreshing food.'

" These recollections crowded on my mind,
Prelude to thoughts most sorrowful indeed.
' That image of the Godhead, once impressed
Upon man's soul, but now defiled and dimmed,
Say, shall it ne'er be reinstated there ?
The types and shadows of a fiery law,
Prefiguring ever better things to come,
O shall they never, never be fulfilled ?

The blood of goats, and lambs, and doves, and steers,
The morning and the evening sacrifice,
Polluting the sweet air with scent of death,
And dyeing Kidron with red streams of gore,
O when shall all these things be swept away ?'

" With sobs and tears, with tears and frequent sobs,
I breathed these questions on the ear of night.

" Reflecting thus upon the past and present,
I often asked myself, and asked again :
' These palm-trees, cherubims, and open flowers
Of lily-work, and image-work, unending,
Carved on walls, on ceiling, within, without,
All overlaid with gold of finest hue,—
Have all these power, with all their symbolism,
Or fancied grace of figures, to wash clean
A soul defiled with sin ? Never, never !
'T was well, it may be, and ordered from above,
That such, along with those who used them, should
(So far as the first temple was concerned)
Be borne, spoils or captives, to Babylon.

" ' Sweeter to me than all this wooden pomp,
This wealth metallic, is the tiniest flower,
That hides its simple beauty in the grass,
Or peeps, with virgin blush, from out the rocks.

Yea, e'en the modest lily of the vale,
That masks its spotless bloom in sheathing green,
Teaches and preaches better things to me
Than Solomon with all his gilded glory.
O for a house not made with human hands !
O for a high-priest, simple, pure, serene,
To lead us forth into the open fields,
Where wheat-stalks, swaying to the gentle breeze,
In graceful undulations, bow their heads,
Adoring Him who made them !'

" These wild words,

The offspring of the moment, scarce had passed
My lips, before a fear and trembling seized me,
Lest I had uttered something impious,
And long I mused in silence. ' Who can tell,'
At last I said, ' but that these images,
These forms symbolic, may prefigure much,
Which, though obscure at present, may become,
Under another revelation, clear
As day. As if a man absorbed in thought,
Eyes fixed on ground, and closely folded arms,
Should see a shadow moving on before him,
And, lifting up his eyes, should view, in air,
A strange, large bird, with wide-expanded wings,

Bedecked with starry plumes and golden gloss,
He wonders much from what far land it came,
And oft compares the dark and dusking shade
Which first aroused him, with the wingèd thing
Now gleaming far beneath a rosy cloud.
So, many a dark and dusky type of law
May lead the gazer's wonder-stricken eye
To a reality, sun-bright and clear.
Forgive me, gracious God, if I have said
Aught sinful or irreverent. I know
How blind is man, when light comes not from heaven.
Enlighten, then, my darkness by thy light ;
O lead me forth from this entangled maze !'
After this prayer I stood, long sunk in thought,
Revolving many questions hard to solve,
And meditating through the solemn night.

" Thus musing, as I said, through half the night.
More tranquil thoughts 'gan roll along my mind,
Like many-colored hoops which children drive
Across some level play-ground. Brighter grew
The prospect as I mused ; at last I called
To memory a saying of Isaiah,
Which brought much consolation to my soul ;
And then another from that other seer,

Who, home returned from Babylon, foretold
The building of the second temple. Thus,
Or nearly thus, the inspired words were penned :
And he, full glad, shall bring forth the headstone,
With shoutings loud, and cries of grace unto it.

“This was the stone on which seven eyes were
graved,

The seven high ministers of the Messiah,
Which to and fro do run about the earth,
To execute the messages of mercy.
The same rapt seer beheld two golden crowns,
Wherewith to crown the Jesus of that time,
Prefiguring, thus, the Jesus of all times,
The King, the great High-Priest of all the world.”



BOOK III.
BORDER-LAND.



YOUNG ROMAN SOLDIER.

Ultima Cumæi venit jam carminis ætas ;
Magnus ab integro sæclorum nascitur ordo.
Jam redit et Virgo, redeunt Saturnia regna ;
Jam nova progenies cœlo demittitur alto.

VIRGIL, Ec. IV.

THUS, while recalling former days, their path
Wound downward to a deep and shady dell,
Where mossy trees arose on either side,
O'erarching with their boughs a babbling stream,
Which, rippling under roots, and o'er rough stones,
Made music sweet and soothing. Turtle-doves
Flew to and fro among the whispering leaves,
And added to the woodland melody
With oft-repeated cooings. An old bridge,
Of rustic structure, stretched from one steep bank
To one as steep upon the other side,
Thus lifting it above the sweep of floods ;

And having stood secure for many years,
'T was covered o'er with moss—antique, but strong—
And offering passage firm to men on foot.

Midway upon this bridge a young man stood,
With roll of written parchment in his hand,
From which he often read aloud. The youth
Was pale and thin, like one who recently
Had risen from bed of sickness. Large his eyes,
Nose aquiline, hair long and curly. Thus
He stood in meditative mood upon
The bridge, and read and gazed, and gazed and read,
Like one wrapt up in pleasing phantasies.

Sudden he heard a footstep on the bridge
Approaching, whilst behind him, up the stream,
The splash of hoofs aroused the solitude
Which for long hours had hushed the quiet scene.
Startled he looked around, and wondered much
What travellers these might be, who journeyed thus,
Bound, as it seemed, on some far distant tour.
A manly form he viewed upon the bridge,
And passing o'er the stream a Lady veiled
Was holding in her arms an Infant Child.
With courteous inclination of the head
(Both were brimful of warm benevolence

And of all kindly feelings), they saluted
Each other with all-hails and benisons,
As if each felt that an immortal spirit
(Immortal, though immured in fleshly prison)
Were passing by. Oft Joseph turned his eyes
Toward the beast that bore his treasured loves,
Lest it might slide upon some slippery stone,
Or sink in hungry sands. But, after drinking,
The animal moved slowly, safely on,
And stood, lamb-gentle, on the other side,
Beneath the shelter of a giant oak.
The young man marked his fondly anxious looks,
And knew from the expression of his eyes,
Where then were sphered the loadstars of his life,
Attracting him with more than human love,
And drawing him from self to something dearer.
"Stranger, hast travelled from afar?" he asked.
"From near the Holy City."

"Whither bound?"

"To the far land of Nile."

"Flying from danger,
Or with intent to visit kinsfolk there?"
"From danger flying—warned by heavenly dream.
I may not tell thee further, youthful friend,

Although thy open looks and kindly eyes
Almost persuade me to relate the whole,
And tell thee many things so new and strange,
As well might task thy faith. What scroll is that
Thou holdest in thy hand ?”

“Some written words
We, of the Ausonian land, call poesy ;
Thou couldst not understand them, sire, unless
Thou hadst some knowledge of the Latin tongue.”

“That language is to me almost unknown ;
But how, being Roman, hast thou learned to speak
The Araméan ?”

“For two years and more
I lived in Palestine. My father was
A questor there, and when my mother died
He still resided in Jerusalem,
And kept me living with him till his death,
Since which I 've been a soldier.”

“Thou dost seem
Like one who has been very ill.”

“Ay, ill,
Wellnigh to death. Nine days I was confined,
The last three wrapt in death-like, lethal swoon ;
Laid out all ready for the funeral pyre,

When flickering life, which almost seemed extinct,
Returned. I rallied—slowly gained some strength ;
But still unable to endure the toil
Of soldiership, I have remained perforce
An idler in the camp.

Of late I have been visiting this glen,
And here have spent some pleasant, thoughtful hours,
Soothed by the coo of doves and voice of streams.
Up yonder, in the hill-side, is a cave
To which I oft retire from noonday heat ;
Around these hills are winding, shady paths,
And quiet nooks are here, and pulsing founts ;
This bridge—yon stream—what more could man
desire,

Except some charming work of poesy,
Such as this scroll contains ? ”

He waved the scroll
With graceful curve, and kissed it, showing thus
How much he prized the precious treasure.

Much
Was Joseph pleased to mark the young man’s warmth,
His swimming, dreamy eyes, and gentle smile,
And the pure marble pallor of his cheek,
As though some work of sculpture had ta’en life,

And the fine chiselled stone were animate,
And now held parley with him. Oft it seemed
As though a spirit on that rustic bridge
Were standing near him—some pale visitant
From death's mysterious realm, with scroll in hand,
Containing notice of an unknown world
Beyond the grave. Again he questioned him
In gentle words:

“The poet's name, I pray thee,
Inform me, and the subject of the writing.”

“Virgilius was his name—Virgilius Maro.
His father was a farmer, and his place
On Mincius' banks—not far from Mantua.
There was the poet born—I 've seen the spot.
My father also owned a farm hard by
Which much resembled it—fine pasture-land,
Sloping down to the water-side ; behind
Were craggy rocks, fit haunt for climbing goats.
Around the homestead beech-trees stood, and elms
O'ercanopied with vines ; and in the garden,
Through which a tiny brooklet wound, was seen
Rich store of beehives, ever humming sweet,
And lulling you to slumber. Wood-pigeons
Kept up a gentle cooing on the tree-tops ;

And there the poet spent his early boyhood."

"A fitting birthplace for a poet," said Joseph, in answer. "Was he prophet too?"

"He called himself a prophet," spoke the youth;
"As prophet most men look upon him now.
This roll contains his Pastorals—so called;
And one of these, addressed to Pollio,
I was engaged in reading when you came.
I wish, sire, you could read it for yourself.
Some say 't is based upon a prophecy,
Which, six long centuries ago, was sung
By the Cumæan Sibyl in her cave,
In which is mention made, in mystic verse,
Of what shall happen in the after-time:
Of an Immaculate Virgin, who shall be
The Mother of a Godlike Child divine,
And of a second happy Age of Gold;
The lion then shall lie down with the lamb;
The child shall sport uninjured with the asp;
The fields shall yield spontaneous crops of grain;
Sweet flowers shall spring where brambles grew
before;
Dread war shall cease, and universal peace
Bless all the nations all around the earth.

Sometimes I think that happy time will soon
Burst on the world. E'en now, e'en now, methinks
Some signs proclaim its advent; how my heart
Dances with rapture at the thrilling thought!"

And, as he spoke, his sickly cheek was tinged
With a light delicate rose of faintest red,
Which some would have pronounced the rose which
Death

Oft paints on cheeks he marks to be his own.

Joseph was deeply moved. Was it not strange,
He thought (and, thinking, stranger still it seemed),
That a far Pagan poet should write thus;
Should weave in Latin verse the self-same thoughts,
The same ideal types and images
Used by inspired Isaiah?

And who, then, could those mystic Sibyls be,
Of whom he had heard mention more than once,
But always dimly, vaguely? More than one,
'T was said, had lived and prophesied on earth,
In Europe and in Asia. Even then
('T was faintly whispered) one of these still lived
In a secluded valley, locked and barred
From all the world by gates of solid rock,
And that her songs still breathed of truth and life,

Though centuries had passed by since her birth.
These thoughts came crowding on his mind, the whilst
That young man, scroll in hand, before him stood
Upon the bridge, rapt in a waking dream.
Then, beckoning him to follow, on he passed,
And walked towards the jewels of his soul.

Startled by hearing footsteps coming near,
Mary turned round her holy head to look,
When—quick as thought—the Roman caught a
glimpse

Of the most heavenly human face that e'er
Imagination pictured to itself,
In moments of the deepest ecstasy.
'T was but a moment's vision. Instantly
Her back alone was seen ; she closed her veil,
And when she turned again, her face was hid,—
Hidden the curve of neck, the arch of brow,
The innocent, sweet mouth, the dimpled chin,—
And, oh, those eyes ! all—all were masked from view ;
For, though the eyes could still be dimly seen,
Like overclouded stars, their holy rays
Were quite obscured and dimmed. The pallid youth,
Slow sauntering by the man past middle age,
Came up in wondering admiration rapt,

And finding thus the mother's face concealed,
Gazed, spell-bound, on the Child.

O who can tell

What a sweet influence, never felt before,
Those holy Infant eyes cast on his soul !
Like consecrated altar lamps, were they,
All filled with holiest oil ? Oh, no, no, no !
Too tame, too tame ! Small planetary orbs,
Reflecting radiance from a hidden sun,
And beaming on the world with all the power
Which old astrologers once dreamed about ?
Too weak, too faint ! Sun-rays from drops of dew
In summer morn reflected, when fair flowers
And blossoming branches wave within the breeze ?
All too inadequate, too faint, too dim !

Could this, then, be the Infant Wonderful,
Of whom he had been reading on the bridge ?
The Virgin Mother this, so long foretold
By mystic Sibyls living far apart,
Foretold by Hebrew prophets, holy men
(For he had heard some rumors of their works) ?
And was the Golden Age about to dawn,
Which the great Mantuan poet had foresung ?
Had not the peopled earth itself become

Prophetic through the continents and isles ?
Were not strange voices borne upon the winds,
And strange oracular meteors seen at night ?

As when an arm of the sea, which winds far up
Among the lonely hills, at time of flood,
Sucks up the tidal wave through all its turns,
And swells and pants, and fluctuates with the heav-
ings

Of the huge ocean-heart of all the world.
Thus through that young man's soul went, billowing,
The spiritual influences then
Abroad among the nations of the earth.
The flow of his emotions was too high
For his weak health to bear. First overstrong
He felt through all his nerves and fibres—then
Weak and aye weaker—till at last he fell,
Like one bereft of life, upon the ground,
And lay all motionless in a deep swoon.

Following the promptings of her woman's heart,
Mary, the Blessed One, dismounted quick,
And throwing off her cumb'rous veil, began
To chafe his wrists and temples ; all in vain.
He moved not—showed no signs of quickening life.
Then Blessed Mary raised her hands in prayer—

Entreating of the Almighty Father
To save the young man's life, and raise him up
From his death-swoon, and grant him health again.
Her prayers—her holy pleadings did prevail.
Soon those large eyes, like planetary stars,
When clouds which hid them have been swept away,
'Gan shine with deep'ning lustre. First, from far
Their beams appeared to radiate—far away—
From some high silvery sphere beyond the earth,
As if their light, in journeying endless space,
Had not yet reached in full this nether globe,
So little recognition did they show.
But soon their human beaming came to them ;
And when he was aware that the sweet face,
Which hung above him then so heavenly fair,
Was the same lovely visage he had seen
When walking from the bridge, his first impulse
Was to adore and worship. But she said :
“ Worship not me, young man, I pray. I am
A passive instrument in Higher Hands,
A simple handmaiden before my God.
That Infant thou seest sporting on the ground,
With butterflies around him, seems to me,
Deep musing on the mysteries of heaven

(Mysteries too vast for human mind to grasp),
A blessed dewdrop, through whose tiny orb
God-sunbeams are refracted. HE who made
Both sun and dewdrop, lives in that small CHILD;
He *is* that CHILD—pervades unbounded space—
Is ever omnipresent—made all worlds,
And still upholds them; see HIM sporting there—
HIM thou mayest worship; more I dare not say.
Farewell. Tell no man what thou hast beheld
To-day, for worse than bloodhounds are unleashed,
Coursing o'er hill and valley, field and town,
Athirst for infant blood. With God I leave thee;
Fulfil the daily duties of thy life,
Wherever these may lie, in camp, or town,
Or country—ever faithful, ever true—
So God, in time, may take thee to Himself,
And we may meet thee in a better world."

Thus speaking, with a calmly pitying smile,
Again she slowly closed her wonted veil,
Most womanlike in every act and speech,—
A woman of the purest, loveliest type,
Without one touch of artifice or pride
Or affectation; all her winsome ways,
And all her graces, seemed pure gifts of heaven.

And when she had resumed her wonted seat,
The foster-father lifted up the Child
With softest care, and placed him in her lap,
Arranging every thing as was most fit
For travel. Then the young man to the Child
Bowed reverently, and said a fervent prayer,
And kissed the young Child's feet once—twice—
yea, thrice.

From that day forth that young man's health grew
sound,
And though he was a faithful Roman soldier,
He was, at heart, a guileless Christian too.
Some say he was that good centurion,
Whose servant, sick to death, in after days,
Was cured by Christ, our ever-blessed Lord,
Because the servant's master had such faith.



BOOK IV.

BORDER-LAND—THE MOUNTAIN PASS.



CANTO I.

“PAN IS DEAD.”

ONWARD and upward, then, the travellers
passed
Along a wilderness of mountain land,
Height after height ascending. At each step
The way grew wilder and more desolate.
The very pines and cedars shrunk to dwarfs
With stunted stems, and crooked, twisted boughs,
And snake-like creeping roots, that strove to catch
And trip the feet of those who passed that way.
Higher and higher still ! At last they reached
A spot, which seemed the loftiest of all
The neighbor eminences ; hushed as death
It stood beneath a sky of darkest blue,
Unvisited by any sound of man
Or beast or bird. Far off, in distance dim,
A little west of north, appeared to view
Jerusalem's temple, stationed on its height,

Now vanishing to nothing ; farther east
The Dead Sea glimmered faintly in the sun,
With Abarim beyond it, peak behind peak.
Southward, far stretching, like a distant sea,
The desert faded into scarce-seen blue ;
Mount Hor was visible, but barely so ;
Whilst nearer, and beneath them, ridges wild,
Needles of rock, and jutting mountain-horns,
Rose in chaotic grouping all around,
With here and there a black, deep mountain glen,
Which seemed to cleave earth's centre. Moments few
The travellers passed in silence on that spot,
Feeling as if cut off from all the world,—
Severed from human kind and voice of life,—
And were about to journey on, when, lo !
The flap of distant wings—but not of birds—
The sound of distant song—but not of men—
Arresting their attention, made them pause.
Another momentary silence, hushed
As death ! and then a sudden symphony
Of instruments celestial ! Then was heard,
Sung by angelic voices, a sweet hymn,
Which words of mine can faintly shadow forth,
But which, in substance, sounded somewhat thus :

HYMN OF THE ANGELS TO THE BLESSED VIRGIN.

Ave Maria !

From pole to equator

Through every latitude,

With praise and with gratitude,

In full-souled beatitude,

Mankind shall sing to thee :

Ave Maria !

Spotted Sin (how we hate her),

Cloven Pan and each Satyr

Have fled, have fled.

O'er land and o'er ocean,

In all its vastity,

The whole world shall ring to thee ;

Dove-eyed Love and Devotion,

And white-pinioned Chastity,

And high-toned Emotion,

Tenderly fluttering, sweet pæans uttering,

Is each on the wing—on the wing to thee.

Ave Maria !

O'er the isles, o'er the continents,

Voices sweet are heard singing now,

" They have fled, they have fled " ;

A mystic cry (hark !) is heard ringing now,

Heard by shepherds and fishermen :

“ Pan is dead—Pan is dead ” ;

Echoing, echoing,

Ever re-echoèd,

“ Pan is dead,

Pan is dead.”

Ave Maria.

Joseph, though little skilled in Grecian myths,
Yet comprehended quick the mystic words
Echoing above, below, and all around,
And knew within his heart that they announced
The downfall of all soul-corrupting creeds
Then dominant in Greece and Italy,
Those master nations of the ancient world.
Thanks to Jehovah, the Almighty One,
These all were down-fallen now—down-stricken—
dead.

And strange! those same mysterious words, 't is
said,

Were heard years after by a fisherman,
Lone rocking in his solitary boat
In the Ionian Sea, when—“ Pan is dead,”
Came swooning, from afar, across the waves,
Re-echoed by the Acarnanian shore

And the Echinean isles—"Great Pan is dead";
Rumor of which soon after having reached
The ears of lewd Tiberias, all his court,
All his astrologers and soothsayers,
Unable to interpret what they meant,
Were stricken pale with fear.

The greatest joy

They brought to Joseph, who straightway announced
Their meaning to the Lady by his side,
Who likewise testified her heartfelt rapture.
Then, after prayer upon that mountain top,
They 'gan descend full swiftly, for his eye,
Well skilled in weather-prophecy, had marked
A slender bank of cloud far to the west,
Which seemed but newly risen from the sea,
And which, he thought, attracted by the mountains,
Would sweep to eastward, burst upon their peaks,
And end in sudden tempest. Down they sped,
Rapid as their sure-footed beast could tread,
Following the slender pathway over rocks,
And rough ravines, and forests of dwarf pines,
Mostly in silence, for the need was great,
And great the skill required of hand and foot.
Thus passed almost an hour; at last they reached

A lower range of mountains, not so dead,
But clad with lofty pines and evergreens,
And freshened by the spray of water-falls,
And here and there enlivened by the voice
And wing of bird.

But lo ! o'erhead the clouds
Are gathering fearfully ; a prelude low,
Of muttering thunder, seems to growl : " Make speed
To find quick shelter, or ye may be lost."
The winds, before asleep, fierce waken now,
And, sounding awfully among the pines,
In unison with thunder seem to chant :
" Make haste—seek shelter quick—ye may be lost."





CANTO II.

THE CAVE OF SEVEN CEDARS.

THREE bowshots o'er a space all bare of trees
They passed with rapid footfall, when, be-
hold,

A cavern's opening mouth, a sheltering cave !
Cave of the Seven Cedars it was named.
On either side three cedars, one on top ;
All fine and noble trunks, like those that grow
On Lebanon. Then Joseph, peeping in
The grotto's opening, found that it was dim,
Dimmer than evening twilight when all glow
Has left the horizon, and black night creeps on ;
So straightway he alit in haste a torch,
Which he before the journey had prepared
With nicest care, and kept within a sack
Slung o'er the beast, with tinder-box and flint,
All ready for quick use. The torch was soon
In blaze, and soon its beams displayed to view

A spacious cavern, snug and dry and warm,
Which seemed to open into other rooms
Reaching far inward.

With a gradual slope
The subterranean floor went shelving up,
So that the coming floods, however fierce,
Could find no access there. A limpid stream,
Whose fountain-head was deep within the mount,
With even pulse came lapsing down the rock,
Unquickened by the hurricane without ;
Which, even now, had fallen upon the woods,
Clashing their tops and tearing up their roots
With an earth-rending clamor. Scarce a breeze,
Scarce a side-eddy entered the cave's mouth,
So firmly on each side 't was buttressed round
With rocky ramparts, shielding it from winds.
There all was calm within. A fervid prayer,
Spontaneous, heart-outgushing, snowy-winged,
Flew through the tempest up to God's abode,
And, as it glided through the golden gates,
The angels fanned it on its fragrant way,
And seraphs swung their censers to and fro,
To waft it onward to the Father's throne,
Enwapt in sweetest perfume.

Joseph then
Helping the Blessed Virgin to dismount,
And, spreading on the cavern's floor a soft
And bright-embroidered carpet, in whose woof
A palm-tree was impictured and a pair
Of white-winged doves, of woven work superb,
He bade her rest in peace, whilst he himself,
Placing his flambeau in the fissured rock,
So that its glare might not offend her eyes,
Drew from his pouch a nicely written scroll
Of well-preserved papyrus, and began
To intone its holy scripture.

O how grand
That antique language of the earliest world,
Whose every word was like a thing alive,
Instinct with many meanings, flashing out
Like lightning from Jehovah's chariot-wheels,
And, as it passed into the listener's brain,
Arousing there old echoes which once pealed
Among the hills of God ! How grand and full
It sounded through that cave—from manliest lips
Outpouring, like a singing mountain-stream,
Full fed from heaven-filled waters ! How each
pause,

Each cadenced ending, grandly was attuned,
And made still more sonorous by the plash
Of million pattering rain drops, heard from far,
And furious, wailing winds, and tumbling cliffs,
And floods down-roaring to the dread abysm,
And all the crash and turmoil of the storm!
And ever rose, through all, "the still, small voice,"
Which, tremulous and plaintive, oft did sound
From out the reader's inmost heart, which mixed
With all, and formed the base of all, with overflow
Of saintly tears, soft trickling down his cheeks,
And dripping on the holy page like dew.

His lectern was a shelf of caverned rock;
His sounding-board the grotto's fretted vault;
His hassock rugged stone; his light, a torch
Such as a traveller fires, in greatest haste,—
When storm and darkness, furious rushing on,
Threaten to swallow him up; his listeners
A Holy Virgin and more Holy Babe;
The winds and waters loud his choristers,
Answering each other in alternate stave;—
His Book the oldest, holiest in the world.

And such a reader! Few, we know, read well.
With him it was an inborn, heavenly gift.



*Where the Virgin sat
Absorbed in silent thought.*

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The whole man read ; tongue, teeth, throat, palate,
 lips;
But chiefly heart and brain ; the volumed sound,
In rhythmic sequence following wave on wave,
Made up a musical current so complete,
So tunable and grateful to the ear,
That she who listened found herself enwrap,
Both soothed and stirred, excited and composed ;
Each word, each syllable, each character
Became alive, and told its own sweet tale ;
For manly strength combined with fluent ease,
For compass and expressiveness of tone,
For sweetness and for force, his reading might
Be likened to that wondrous water-organ
Renowned of old in Alexandria,
Which a keen, subtle-thoughted brain devised,
And hung in Zephyr's temple ; by strange art,
Currents of air by water's force were driven
Through delicatest tubes, now strong, now soft,
So cunningly contrived, so nicely fashioned,
That when the music played, it seemed as though
The lofty dome was mounting in mid-air,
To yield a prospect of that loftier one
Reared by the world's great Author ; so it seemed ;

And many a traveller, many a pilgrim felt
The melody's enchantment. Thus it was
With Joseph's wondrous reading.*

Rapt away
In fancy to the times beyond the flood,
And lulled into a sweet, poetic dream,
Not quite asleep as yet, nor quite awake,
The Virgin gently sank into a state
Of pleasing languor, full of phantasy,
Like some sweet bird upon a rocking bough,
After the time of sunset. Much had she seen,
And much was still to see ere close of day,
And nature needed some repose and rest
After so much excitement. By her side
The Almighty Infant slept as sweet a sleep
As did the roseate mother.

Still the storm
Outside swept furious o'er the mountain tops,
And still the pious reader, rapt, absorbed,—
With eyes fixed on the old papyrus scroll,
Aroused the dead words on the antique page,
Making them start to life and melody.
Turning his head at last, he bent his view

* See Note.

Toward the loadstars of his life. Behold
A sight of terror !
Behold a monstrous lion crouching there,
As if in act to spring. Yea, near the feet
Of the two sleepers ! Flying from the storm,
The savage beast had sought a shelter there,
His tameless nature tamed and quite subdued
By all-resistless thunder. Still he lay ;
Perhaps he meant not, couchant though he was,
To make the fatal spring ; quite cowed he looked,
And overmastered by some potent spell
Which made him like a sculptured lion seem.
Then Joseph, on the instant, seized his torch,
And, moving towards the monarch of the woods,
Full in his eyes he shook the bickering flame,
And roused him from his cat-like attitude.
One moment man and beast glared at each other—
The next—the lion wheeled and fled the cave,
Swift-rushing forth into the maddening storm,
And howling down the mountains. Hark his roar,
Mixed with the thunder's voice and din of floods !

Whilst all this passed, the Holy Lady slept ;
Still slept the God-born Child. In sweetest dreams
She, slumber-bound, was holding converse high

With seraphims and bright, cherubic shapes,
'Midst heavenly plants embowered, beside a stream
In Paradise, with harpers harping round—
Sleep within sleep involved, dream wrapped in dream.
The angel Gabriel she seemed to see
In garb and feature such as when he came
To announce the advent of the Saviour Lord.

He seemed like one

Who does a painful duty gracefully,
But still against his will. He held a flower
Before her view, reciting all the while
Some verses, very sweet, but somewhat sad,
But full of most heart-thrilling mystery,
Which hung, like drapery, around the stem ;
Neither concealing it, in full, from view,
Nor quite revealing it. She reached her hand
And took the flower, half smiling, weeping half ;
She knew not what the mystic flower meant,
She could not have expressed her thought in words,
But a strange forefeel of some future woe
Thrilled through her frame and thus suffused her
eyes.

Joseph seemed less, than she, to understand
What meant the mystic plant ; much did he say

To overcome the force of sympathy ;

But all in vain—in vain—

The big tears trickled down his ruddy cheek

And manly beard, like rain drops from wet eaves.

Then stretched the Holy Child his little hands,

As if he wished to grasp the mystic flower,

To scan it, fondle it, mayhap to play with it.

The crown of thorns, the spear, the five red wounds,

The triple nails, the scourge, the holy wood,

All the twelve mystic instruments of woe

And glory, all in floral portraiture

Displayed, were there.

Then the holy Angel

Seemed to hold up a sprig of evergreen,

And thus presented it with mystic rhymes :

“ Here are leaves evergreen,

Close-plated, thick and dense,

Not shaking easily,

Ne'er moving breezily,

Sweeter than frankincense.

The tree those leaves grow upon

Is not a mighty one,

Like trees of Lebanon.

'T is not lofty, 't is not mighty,
Seems not so to mortal eye;
Some do call it Arbor Vitæ,
Ever pointing to the sky.

“Steadily, steadily,
Blow the winds rough or soft,
It looks to God aloft,
Like a saint's daily life,
Green under winter's snow.
Take these leaves, crush them up,
They will the sweeter grow,
Readily, readily,
Giving their fragrance forth.
Take these leaves of Arbor Vitæ,
Crush them, smell them, Lady, try;
'T is not lofty, seems not mighty,
But points ever to the sky.”

The Wingèd One then told in simple words
About the evergreen tree, what kind of roots
It spread beneath the soil, how it was found
On both the Atlantic shores, and adding thus:
“The time has not arrived by centuries

Fourteen, when a far-distant land, most rich
And grand, shall be made known to those that dwell
On this side the great ocean. Then shall rise
A pious, subtle-thoughted man o' the sea,
Who, praying much, and studying much, shall sail,
After his hair grows white, across the wave,
And reach a wondrous country—a New World.
His very name, so called by his compeers,
Shall seem prophetic of the mighty deed,
So strangely oft are wonderful world-events
Link'd in a golden chain, with ring in ring,
All closely interwoven and compact.
Christophoro Colombo, his two names!
The first is founded on a future myth
(For many strange myths shall spring up and take
Firm root in the belief of coming men),
Of a vast giant, who shall bear, they 'll say,
A Holy Child upon his shoulders broad,
And with him on his back, shall wade across
A deep, wide water (so shall run the legend);
The second name means—or will mean—a dove.
On these two emblems long might fancy brood,
And build a world of wonders."

Then Joseph came, and with most gentle touch

Wakened the Virgin, chanting with low voice :
" Arise, arise ! the tempest's voice has ceased ;
The rainbow's arch is spanning all the east ;
The westering sun in pomp will set erelong ;
Arise, come forth, sweet Mother of the Lord,
Lady Immaculate ! come forth and see
The splendor and the beauty and the glow."
The Virgin Mother opened soft her eyes,
And smiled, and rose, and lifted up the Child.
Then Joseph quickly quenched the burning torch,
Unjointed it, and placed it in the sack,
With flint and tinder-box, for future use ;
Relieved the Mother of the Holy Weight
That rested in her arms ; and soon the pair
Stood, calmly gazing, near the cavern's mouth.

Said Joseph : " We must leave this lonely mount,
This Cave of the Seven Cedars. Who can tell
But that some friendly shepherds may be found
Around the mountain's foot, whose sheltering tents
To-night shall give us hospitable welcome,
And a safe, quiet place wherein to sleep.
Hark how the maddened waters roar, and vex
The air with wildest clamor. Night is coming.
I fear we cannot pass the swollen floods

Which, all unbridged, fierce tumble down the hills ;

And yet a secret voice within me cries :

‘ Go on—go on—if water’s power is strong,

The power of faith is stronger—man, go on.’

What think’st thou of that voice ?”

“ Obey its hest,”

Said Mary, looking, trustful, up to heaven,

And folding Jesus closer to her breast.

“ Obey its hest ; thy guardian angel speaks,

Unseen, but hovering near. Since we have been

Upon this journey, firmly I believe

We never, night or day, have been alone ;

And whilst our thoughts keep pure, our aims sincere,

Alone we ne’er shall be. Bad spirits loosed from hell,

And evil demons ranging round the world,

May still be on the watch to do us hurt,

And harm this Holy Being in my arms ;

But vain shall be their efforts whilst we two

Are faithful to ourselves and true to Him ;

Therefore, lead forward.”

Forward still they went.

It was an antique mountain road, deep-worn

By years of travel ; sumpter-mules in lines,

Mule after mule, slow stepping up the rocks,

Had often passed these dizzy heights before,
The drivers cheering them with songs the while,—
As still is done in Spain ; and had the storm
Not swelled the streams, or swept away each bridge,
It still were passable to man or beast.
But scarcely had they travelled half a league,
Before a turbid watercourse, loud-voiced,
And swift and turbulent, rushed athwart their way,
Seeming to bar all passage. Stock-still stood
The beast which Joseph led, aghast with fear ;
Far-darkening shadows fell from rocks around,
Making the dusk of evening still more dread.
“A gloomy spot to spend the night.” “Indeed,
'T would be so—but more gloomy still to turn
And to retrace our steps which we have ta'en,
With mickle toil, adown the channelled rocks ;
And gloomier still than all, the thought that we
Were travelling even half a league towards the spot
Where dwells the blood-stained tyrant we are fleeing.”
A sudden turn, lo ! a one-arched bridge
Uprose and spanned with doubtful strength the flood,
As if inviting them to pass. Without
One shudder of alarm, one tremor slight,
They passed the bridge, by faith led on, by faith

Upheld. Scarce had they cleared its twofold grades,
Before, with sudden crash, the mass gave way,
And down were swept its timbers and its piers,
And, whirling round and round, were quickly dashed
Sheer o'er the toppling precipice that yawned
On one side of the bridge ; the water-fall
Swift sucked them down, and in an instant's time
The structure all had vanished.

“ Fearful sight,”

Said Mary, clasping firmer her sweet charge,
And looking up to heaven with thankful heart.
“ Greater the peril, sweeter the escape,”
Said Joseph, moving briskly down the mount,
With firm hand leading forward the awed beast.





CANTO III

THE ARAB ENCAMPMENT.

DOWNWARD in savage zigzags, ever down,
The solitary track conducted them
Past many a scene of horror ; under crags
Which, toppling overhead, threatened to fall
If loosened by a breath ; by dizzy brinks,
One glance at which inflicted thoughts of terror
Blacker than dreams of nightmare. More than once
Some vast o'erhanging rock far off was heard,
Torn from its base by hungry, eating floods,
To tumble headlong down with all its pines.

Ere long they reached an open, treeless knoll,
From which they viewed the prospect stretching dim.
As thus they stood at gaze, and vainly strove,
By aid of the far stars (too vastly far
To illumine objects on this nether earth),
Behold ! again that wonderful Light 'gan beam
From the Almighty Child, which now and then

(Not always) issued in mysterious streams,—
Light which the angels could not understand—
An effluence differing from known solar light
In many ways, though softer, more intense ;
More luminous, but less dazzling ; though serene,
All-perceant ; though as bland as olive-oil,
As penetrative as the electric spark ;
Diffusive, mystic, increate, unknown.
As mariners watch the changes of the tide,
The Virgin Mother, with attentive eye,
Since the Child's birth had watched its ebbs and
flows ;

But still she understood it not—knew not
Whence or how came it, or by what strange laws
Its intermitted efflux was evolved ;
But oft, deep musing, in her secret heart
She thought that as it seldom ever shone
Except when the God-Child was sunk in sleep,
That visions of his ante-natal life
Perhaps were then bright-flashing through his brain,
Like summer lightnings through a sleeping cloud,
At sunset, when the air is all serene,
And earth wrapt up in dreams. At such times, too,
Soft-wreathing smiles were often seen to pass

Across his infant features beautiful,
Like silvery ice-blinks, seen in polar seas,
When Northern Lights are dancing, and starred
Night

Seems lovelier than proud Day.
Below them a rich tract of table-land
Stretched southward in far upward-rising slope,
Where lovely clumps of trees were intermixed
With pastures; and still farther (wished-for sight),
Sweet shepherd tents all gleaming in the glow
Of that clear primal light.

Onward they passed
In silence mostly, for such pleasing thoughts
Becalmed them both, that neither wished to speak.
At last the Virgin Mother, in these words,
Commenced to think aloud: "Since Gabriel came
And in my lowly home at Nazareth
Announced to me the coming wonder-birth,
This earth has scarce seemed earth. I know not how,
Sometimes it seems to me as though I lived
Wrapt round and round in some high, holy dream,
Like a bright cloud in which a spirit dwells,
While other clouds, far off, some not so bright,
And some with thunderbolts but half concealed,

,

Send forth low, muttering peals. Things once so
strange

Seem strange no longer; wonder seems no wonder.
Yes, from the time that Gabriel spoke to me
And told me of the things which were to come,
The commonest things of earth have hallowed been;
My lowly village home appeared transformed,
The same and not the same. But see those herds
Of cattle to our left—how numerous!
And to our right, far on the highest hills,
What endless flocks of sheep! and, farther on,
Camels and kids and asses! Lo! it seems
As though some patriarch of the olden time,
With all his flocks and herds and clustered tents,
Had settled down upon this grassy slope
For pasture."

Joseph raised his eyes, and looked
Around with scrutinizing glance, and scanned
The pastoral landscape. "Need of caution now.
Perhaps some nomad chief or Arab sheik,
Near us encamped, may be among those tents."

A furlong thence they reached some circling tents,
High overtopped by many a lofty palm.
Addressing some they saw reposing there,

On the green turf, the men began to stare
As though they understood not ; but at last,
By signs and words Semitic (they were Arabs),
Joseph made them conceive the thing he meant.
Then did they lead the travellers slowly on
To where the chieftain sat within his tent,
Upon a gorgeous cushion, stretched at ease,
Playing some game of chance with one who seemed
His favorite wife (another tent hard by
Contained some other wives and concubines);
And Joseph told his story then so well
(The chief knew well the tongue of Holy Land),
And answered all his questions with such skill,
Divulging just enough to satisfy
But not betray, and all with so much grace,
Such show of openness and want of guile,
That the pleased chief, half robber though he was,
Gave orders that the travellers should be served
With the best fare his tented home could yield.
And, better to insure this end, he told
Some trusty servitors, with utmost care,
To lead the Lady to his mother's tent,
And give her to that matron's kindly charge
Till morrow noon—for Joseph had made known

His wish to start at dawn.

The Virgin Mother

Was by that antique Arab dame received

With show of utmost kindness. Long she gazed

Upon her youthful beauty; longer still

Upon the Godlike beauty of the Child.

Such holy, heavenly eyes! She ne'er had seen

Aught like them. Then, those graceful, curling
locks!

Through which such gleams of light seemed inter-
twined,

That much as she admired them, a strange awe

Stole over her. Never had she seen such light

Round any human head. It seemed at times

As though around his curls a thin, thin circlet

Of delicatest texture came and went,

Now melting into nothing, now aglow,

Like rainbows round a mist-hung water-fall;

And still she gazed and gazed, until her eyes,

Which often had absorbed the desert's glare,

Shone like an ancient Sibyl's. Lo! her lips

'Gan move with fitful motion; much she spoke

In rhythmic measure in the Arab tongue,

Which Blessed Mary understood not fully,

Although she thought it seemed like prophecy.
At last that ancient mother fell asleep,
The Infant sweetly slumbered, and the Virgin,
After her wanderings long, sank to repose,
And all within the tent were hushed to rest.



BOOK V.
BORDER-LAND.
(Continued.)



CANTO I.

MYSTERY OF SOUND—MYSTERY OF WATER.

SO deep had been the Virgin's sleep that night,
So sweet, so pure, so hushed, so holy calm,
Almost it seemed like sleep of saintly death.
Thus soul and body, which had been outworn
By the long travel of the day before,
Were perfectly restored.

When Mary rose,
The old Arab mother also rose,
Subservient to the wishes of her guest.
Her maids she also roused, and bade them fetch
Pure water from the spring, and napkins clean,
Ewer and basin,—all that was required
For that more common and recurrent rite
Of daily baptism, type of one more high
And spiritual. In an inner space,
Veiled and partitioned from the common room,
The Virgin and the Child remained enshrined

As long as needful was ; then fresh and bright,
As morning star uprising from the sea,
Effulgent she came forth, and filled the tent
With splendor. Then again that antique dame,
In reverent posture bending to the earth,
Worshipped the Holy Child, and all her maids,
With an instinctive reverence, worshipped too,
Much wondering why their knees were drawn to
earth,

And whence that more than starry radiance came.

“ Ho ! ”—Joseph’s voice from outside cheerful
rang—

“ All hail, beloved of heaven, come forth, come
forth ;

The Morning Star is singing blithe for joy,
Although we hear him not ; all dewy-fresh,
Cool Night still wears some jewels in her crown,
Erelong compelled to lay them gradual by,
Until her coronation time returns.”

Blessing and blessed, the Virgin issued forth,
As yet unveiled, beneath the holy stars,
And as the doubled splendor moved along,
The Infant Saviour gazed upon the sky
With his sweet, lustrous eyes, and waved his hands,

And jumped in his mother's arms, and crowed and
laughed,

And crowed again, as though he meant to say
To those far worlds, "Good-morning." On they
went,

Silent at first, for near a fragrant mile,
With gaze still upward turned, as though the earth,
Fresh as it was, and dewy, had for them
But slight attraction when compared with heaven ;
A threefold silent worship ! From afar
The voice of floods and watercourses roared,
Telling full ruefully of recent storms,
And sounding like the din of dying war ;
And as the travellers slowly journeyed on,
Old earth appeared to thrill through all her bulk,
As though some mystic Power were passing then,
Oracular, dim-booming. Lamp on lamp
The lights were waxing faint in heaven's high vault,
And that dusk point of time came creeping on,
When, for brief season, heaven seems growing gray,
And earth, being not yet lighted, the vast world
Seems brown with lingering twilight.

Then arose
Two voices, bass and treble, sweetly tuned,

Singing a psalm of David ; whilst a third,
A tenor, thrilling on through boundless space,
Through earth, through air, through all the fading
stars,

Accompanied the human chant, and rose
Or fell, swelled up, or died away, or paused,
As it did, forming one accordant mass
Of harmony, the music of all worlds,
A mighty diapason, formed of all,
All interpiercing, all-embracing, grand.

Before the psalm was finished, all the stars
Had faded ; Phosphor vanishing last. As when
In some magnificent cathedral, all
The service being ended, silent crowds
Pace, thoughtful, down the aisles toward the door,
The solemn organ pealing all the while,
Until the worshippers have disappeared ;
So, whilst that chant was sounding, star on star,
Evanishing, with slow and solemn tread,
Left heaven's broad aisles, and Night, close-muffled,
shut
Her mighty minster-doors.

Soon daybreak came,
Whose delicate, rosy hues scarce-tinged the east,

Before they 'gan to fade, all flooded o'er
And swallowed up in sunshine. Then was heard
The song of skylark mounting up to heaven ;
Then every nested tree sent forth a stream
Of melody, composed of various notes,
And such a piping, trilling, warbling rose,
All intermixed, all in confusion heaped,
That, had the notes been louder, or less sweet,
The discord would have jarred upon the ear.

“ Each sings as best he can,” said Joseph, whilst
They passed a grove of trees where such a choir
Of birds was chanting—“ each as best he can.
Perhaps there may be men with ears so fine,
With such a full and perfect grasp of sound,
With such a knowledge of the song of birds,
That when they hear so many, all at once,
They can take in the whole, and every part ;
While each melodious gush, each tiny rill
Of music, flowing many ways at once,
May be collected, grasped, retained, and held
Until the brain takes cognizance of all.
Such men there well may be, and such I think
There are. Hence we may well believe that when
On Sabbath-days, through all the Holy Land,

In temple, synagogue, and private room,
A million voices rise at once in prayer,
Or hymns of thanksgiving, the Ear Supreme
Can clasp them all,—no still, small voice unheard ;
No faintest note unheeded."

" Even so,"

Said Mary, pointing to a blasted tree ;
" As at a single glance the rolling eye
Takes in trunk, branches, bough, and spray
Of yon tall oak, with all its intricate
Complexity of network, shoot, and twig ;
So does the Ear of God, as I believe,
Catch every rustle of the smallest leaf
That shakes on every tree round all the earth,
The sound of every wave on every shore,
The note of every bird in every land,
The faintest voice of every blade of grass,
Or tiniest buzz of smallest insect's wing."

Then Joseph answered thus, in thoughtful mood :
" The brain turns giddy when we strive to grasp
The mysteries of Godhead ; when we brood
In fancy o'er the congregated sounds
Of all creation,
From thunderclaps and dashing cataracts,

Down to the chirp of cricket in the grass,—
The loud, the soft, the musical, the harsh,
The myriad sighs and pants and sobs and shouts,
Death-groans and merriest laughter, all combined,
And each distinctly heard."

Thus they, in thought,
On fancy's ladder strove to mount to God.
The matin song of birds, the earliest heard,
Led them from thought to thought successive up,
Until thought's instrument, the laboring brain,
Grown dizzy, told them they had seen enough,
And bade them thence descend.

Erelong they left
Those grassy slopes and meads, where they had seen
The nomads in their tents, and, winding up
The crowning ridge, came to a region wild
And lone and savage ; gorges black as death,
With cedars overbrowed and wailing pine,
Yawned round them and before them ; on they
moved,

Now passing o'er a trembling rustic bridge
Which spanned a deep ravine ; now creeping on
Along a breakneck mule-path, wild and rough ;
Now wading through a brawling mountain-brook ;

Now hanging on a toppling precipice,
Where one false step were death. The sun, new-
risen,

Was masked from view, or only shot his beams
Athwart the topmost peaks or loftiest pines,
Or now and then, with narrow fringe of light,
Through some side-opening in the riven rocks,
Gleamed through a mass of shadow.

“Ho! a land,”
Said Joseph, “where a hunter might rejoice.”

Along the shadowy gorge they journeyed slow,
Observant of the sylvan scene around.
Sly foxes peeped at them and slunk away;
The agile squirrel leaped from tree to tree,
Arching his tail; the coney of the rock
Looked at them as they passed, and slid from view;
Aloft from some tall peak the eagle rose,
Far sailing o’er the loftiest mountain tops,
As though he spurned his eyrie as too low.
Once, from the tallest height which they had reached,
They saw below a river of white mist,
Which, rising from a rivulet’s scant bed,
Filled all a hollow vale from side to side,
And showed the windings of the stream beneath.

Though made of vapor, all billowy and grand,
It rolled and spread, and in the distance looked
Like real moving water.

“ Beautiful,”

Said Joseph, pointing to the mimic stream,
“ Are most of the many forms which water takes,
Though some are also fearful. Type of love
And of destruction! Emblem of the might
And the beneficence of the Supreme !
How various are the shapes thou canst assume ;
How awful and how lovely! Thread-like rills
Thou leadest now adown smooth emerald slopes ;
Now, Samson-like, thou shak'st the pillared globe
As if thou strov'st to wrench it from its base,
And overwhelm the whole in ruin.”

Here he paused,

And like a singer who, in key too high,
Has tuned his descant, in a lower note
Continued thus :

“ Even ice is beautiful,
With pictured surface, mimicking the form
Of fern, or feathers, spray, or tapering twigs,
Or pine leaves needle-shaped.
Most beautiful is frost when seen upon

Thin-bladed grass, or candying mossy rocks ;
And as for flakes of snow, oh ! I have watched them
With wonder, on the sides of Lebanon,
When I was there among the wood-cutters,
And often did I scan their curious figures
When newly-fallen—stars, and spoked wheels,
And many lovely shapings crystalline.
All these are forms of water—all are fair—
And see"—he pointed to the other side,
Where, opposite the opening, which disclosed
The vaporous river, streamed a water-fall
Of slender body, but of dizzy height,
Down-misting, wide out-streaming from the rock
Like the Swiss Staubbach,—“ see yon cataract
(If so it may be called), how it melts away
To rainbowed mist before it reaches earth.
Can aught in nature be more beautiful?
Then see"—he pointed to the other side—
“ That stream of volumed fog that fills yon vale,
Like distant rolling thunder dream-like on ;
And see"—and now he pointed overhead—
“ Those wingèd waters wafted o’er the sky,
Those locked-up lakes afloat through heaven’s vault,
Those voyaging reservoirs, from land to land

Sailing ; those cisterns sealed, which, when the time
Has come, will pour down on the thirsty fields
Effusion bland ! are they not beautiful ? ”

“ Indeed they are,” said Mary, smiling sweet.

“ Most fair are clouds whenever they appear,
Except when blackening into thunderstorms ;

And so are subterranean streams, if we
Could see them with the eye as they are seen

By fancy, flowing, gurgling up and down
In million-fold meanders, small and large,
Vein linked to vein, a labyrinthine maze.

Most fair is water e’en when forced by art
To rise in jets, and, arching graceful round,
To overflow, and fall in circular sheet
Around a marble basin’s rounded rim.

Fair is it, seen from airy bridge’s arch,
With gentle current ever gliding on,
Aye coming, going, like a stream of thought ;
Fair, when, in graceful aqueduct, it bears
The mountain’s gelid freshness to the town.

• Before the earth was born, and all was void,
God’s Spirit moved upon the water’s face.
It keeps the globe we live on fresh and green ;
It bore the Ark above the highest hills ;

It started from the rock at Moses' touch ;
It purifies, it cleanses ; only when
It stagnates, does it lose its lustral power,
And turn to poison. I have said enough."





CANTO II.

HALT BY A WAYSIDE SPRING.

A T noon they reached a ridge of wooded hills,
Which, having mounted, on the other side,
Below the brow, beneath a towering rock,
O'ercanopied with ivy and wild vines,
They found a limpid stream. A place it seemed
Of ancient pilgrimage and rural mirth ;
For, all around it, on the emerald sward,
Were circles, such as fairies used to make
Around enchanted fountain and green mead,
When fairies haunted earth. By human feet
Those rings had rounded been ; though at the time
The travellers reached them, dancers there were
none.

The cool, delicious spot invited them
With voice of lapsing waters, tumbling down
The slope below them, and with whispering leaves,
Till noonday heats were passed, to check their
course,

To slake their thirst, and to enjoy repose.
Below them, in the distance, pastoral pipes
Were heard in dreamy cadence sweet and soft,
Steeping the listener most deliciously
In happy visions of the Golden Age,
When shepherds all were blessed, and war and hate
Were names unknown on earth.
How cool that fountain's lymph ; how musical
Those seven-reeded, clear Pandean pipes ;
How sweet the breath of wildflower-scented breeze ;
How soft the feel of turf around that spring ;
How cosily, amid the clustering leaves
That draped the rocks, the birds peeped from their
nests !

All the five inlets of the human temple,
Like the five portals of a sacred church,
Received, each one, its pious worshippers ;
The senses five were sated, and the soul
Sunk in elysian dreams.

The Holy Child,
With more than wonted glee, began to laugh,
And gambol on the Virgin's youthful lap,
Twisting her ringlets into lovelier curls,
Kissing her rosy dimples—laughing still—

And frolicking with ever-varying wiles,
As joyous children do. They two, the Child
And the Child's Virgin Mother, sported then,
As oft two angel-children sport in heaven,
When circling seraphs drop their golden harps,
To watch their innocent gambols, and to glad
All heaven with rosier smiles.

Joseph, meanwhile,
Low-seated on the bench of turf, looked on,
And tears of ecstasy came oozing forth,
And, as they trickled down his ruddy cheek,
He knew not whence they came. How his big
heart,

So pure, so human, throbbed within his breast
With feelings human-heavenly, such as he
Had never felt before or had conceived!
Soon a sweet, wakeful calm crept softly o'er
All three, broke only by a silent gleam
Of happiness, expressed by looks, not words,
As when, o'er twilight heavens some summer eve,
Sweet lightnings play without the smallest sound
Of thunder e'en from far: such was the calm
Which hushed them, sweeter than the calm of sleep.

Then, wafted on an aromatic breeze,

A butterfly of exquisite beauty came
And lit upon the Child-God's little hand,
And 'gan to ope and shut its winglets four,
As if to show their pictures and their gloss.
It was of that peculiar kind which men
Who study insects, birds, and shells, and flowers,
Have named Apollo; white its silk-soft wings,
White and transparent near the shapely tips;
Cream-white all four, with borders velvet-black,
And on the lower ones two beauty-spots,
Eye-shaped, inclosed in carmine-colored rings;
The spots were outlined black, cream-white within—
Type of the spirit-eyes within the soul.
The Infant Saviour smiled, the Virgin smiled,
And still the painted wonder oped and closed
Its tiny seraph-pinions.

Then the Child,
Watching the time when all the wings were raised
Erect above its back, with thumb and finger
Of his right hand (it rested on the left)
Seized it with touch so exquisitely soft,
So Godlike delicate, that not one line
Of beauty was defaced—no, not one hue
Of plummy picturing was erased or smutched,

And ever smiling rosier than at first,
He raised it in the breeze, and left it free
To circle heavenward. Then He clapped his hands
Till out of sight it floated, like a boy
Who, on some dewy morning, sees a lark
Soar, jocund, from a meadow to the skies ;
Thus flew that Psyche from the Saviour's hand
Freed, freshened, beautified, more buoyant grown.

Then long the Virgin Mother mused and mused,
And still the charming wonder charmed her more,
Till fancy, self-perplexed and riddle-bound,
Dissolved in its own workings.

Soon, again,

A lovely insect lighted on the Child,
This time, a seven-spotted lady-bird.*
The mother, then, as mothers oft are wont,
Began to count the mystic spots aloud,
Bidding the Child repeat them after her,
Thus giving him, with many a dimpled smile,
His first and ne'er-forgotten lesson in
The sacred lore of numbers. Soon He could
Re-word them without error up to seven,
The holiest of them all, as then was thought.

* *Coccinella septempunctata*.

The foster-sire, seeing how quickly He
Treasured the numbered spots within his brain,
Remembering every name with perfect ease,
Arose and took his pilgrim's staff in hand,
And bade the Mother bear the CHILD along
To where a little patch of silvery sand
Had bubbled from the spring, and edged its brim,
Forming a natural tablet, blank and clear ;
Then, with his staff's point, marking in the sand
(As ancient sages in their schools were wont
When teaching mathematics), drew distinct
The sacred Hebrew letters, one by one,
From Aleph down to Tav, and spoke aloud
Each letter's name, and bade the Child repeat
Them after him, with voice articulate,
As childish lips could speak them ;
Then bade him count them, and then added three
Additional letters—Cheth, Teth, lastly Yodh,
Telling their names and numbers o'er and o'er ;
Then held his twice five opened fingers up,
And counted off full ten upon their tips ;
And so the Child received the lesson first
In these mysterious signs which are the keys
To unlock the doors of all the sciences,

The sacred elements which spell the Word,
The marks which God himself impressed on stone
With his own finger—writing down His Law.

The Child seemed much delighted with the task,
And, as he still soft-babbled o'er and o'er
The letters and the figures, holy light
'Gan play around his glossy ringlets bright,
And delicate rainbows came and went,
Vanished and formed, appeared and disappeared,
Their wondrous loveliness increasing with
Each change. One, ever as it came, displayed
The seven listed colors oftenest seen ;
The other, like a secondary bow,
More striking in its faintness, showed but three,
Together forming thus the cyclic ten.

Then Joseph, struck with the wonder, cried aloud :
" Palmoni," sinking reverent on his knees,
And breaking forth in prayer devout and deep.

Behold ! along the winding path, which led
Up from the valley, came two shepherd lads,
Curly and blooming, with a damsel fair,
Their still more lovely sister. In their hands
They bore sweet pipes with seven-graded reeds,
And baskets full of fruit, and bread, and wine,

Intending by that airy hill-top fount
To feast, and dance, to sing, and to make merry.

Seeing the Holy Family by the spring,
They were abashed, and turned to run away ;
But Mary called them with a voice so sweet,
They needs must turn again, and Joseph called,
And the Child called as loud as call he could
'(The louder still the sweeter), and they came.

They came with baskets full, and open hearts,
And shared the bread and wine with those they
loved,

Though strangers to them. O communion sweet !
Of wine the quantity was fitly scant ;
The parents, being good and pious folk,
According to their gifts of time and place
(They lived in caves, and not in nomad tents),
Had meted out such portion of rich wine
(Mellowed by age) as might suffice to give
A kind of consecration to the feast.
What had been portioned out with care for three,
Of course was still more scant diffused through five,
But still the spirit-symbol was the same—
Blood of the grape—and that of choicest kind,
Old, mellow, purified, and fiery-bland,

Drop-wise effective. Moderation thus,
Like a veiled priestess, with clean hands, pure heart,
Abuses not the gifts which serve as types
Of richer gifts stored in the spirit-world.

Thus, having feasted with their new-found friends,
They tuned their seven-stopped pipes and played
their best ;

And whilst those piped, the sweet, gazelle-eyed girl
Sang a strange, old-world ditty, which, she said,
Had chanted been by damsels ere the Flood.
It was both sad and sweet, both wild and soft,
And often, with its simple touches, drew
Tears down the listener's cheek.

And then they danced

A kind of fountain-dance around the spring,
More gracefully than fairies ever danced,
When fairies haunted earth. Scant stock of dress
Had they to hide the beauties of their forms ;
Bright necklaces of berries red as blood,
Sheen bracelets of pied shells, and ankle-bells
Of silver, which they tied on for the dance.
Around their bodies striped tunics gleamed,
Leaving their arms and nether members bare
Below the knee—all nude the well-formed feet,

Except the damsel's ; she wore sandals soft
Of doeskin ; wild flowers ranged in gay festoons
Adorned her waving curls. And so they danced,
And sang and played for many a jocund hour,
In innocence of heart.

And when the dance
Was ended, and the tune which gave it life
And rhythmical being had attained its close,
All rested on the turf in languor sweet,
And as they talked, full many an ancient myth,
Full many a sacred history, true as life,
Long dormant in the brain, uprose afresh,
With all its epic turns and lyric bursts,
Now moving on in words of home-sweet prose,
Now soaring up on wings of poesy.
Once, Mary seized the maiden's tambourine
(In old times called a timbrel), then began,
In sweetest words of simple narrative,
To tell the children all about the times
When Moses, dry-shod, passed the deep Red Sea,
And of those chariots which moved heavily,
Their dragging wheels struck off, and of the waves
That walled the Hebrews round to right and left—
All the old story, old but ever new ;

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And when she came to where the chant was sung,
Then Joseph's pilgrim staff began to beat
In tune, his foot to stamp in rhythmic time,
And then uprose in all its early glow,
The oldest song e'er written down in words
Since the creation of this rolling globe,
Mary with voice and clashing timbrel-bells,
With hand accordant and uprisen form,
Sounding the lofty chorus :

"Sing to the Lord,
For He hath triumphed gloriously ; the horse,
And eke the horse's rider hath He thrown
Deep-whelmed beneath the sea."

Like Miriam dancing by the Red Sea-side,
With strains triumphal 'midst her timbrel'd throng,
What time the tide at flow came heaving on
O'er the dread wreck-strewn shore, uptossing still
More carcasses with tangled sea-weed wreathed,
More broken chariot-wheels, more shattered limbs,
More steeds dead drifting on the moaning flood ;
Like Miriam seemed the Virgin as she sang,
And struck high music from the tambourine.
At last the lads and their sweet, black-eyed sister
Rose to go. The Virgin kissed the lass,

And blessed the merry boys, and ere they went
The damsel kissed the Holy Child's sweet lips,
And then they scampered down the steep hill-side,
Having in very play imbibed some rays
Of grace divine which blessed them all their lives.

Beyond the fount a thorny shrub there stood,
With spines and blossoms armed and beautified,
In midst of which a nest cunningly was hid,
Built by a goldfinch. All without 't was lined
With moss, with lichen, and with woven grass,
Within with hair and wool and swallows' down.
Five young were lodged within its concave cradle,
As yet not fully fledged. Incessant came and went
The careful parents, bringing to their brood
The needful nutriment. The foster sire,
To please the Child, and show him the sweet ways
Of loving wingéd things, uplifted him
Upon his stalwart shoulder, Atlas-like,
And bade him peep into the blossomed nest,
All guarded round with thorns. Much was he pleased
To hear the chirping, see the open mouths,
And list the pleasant songs the parents sang
When resting for a moment on the boughs
They raised such tuneful warbling. Strange it was

To see the Lord of Life, enshrined within
An infant's tiny, tender form, and made
Amenable to laws of human growth,
Thus gazing on the things Himself had fashioned,
With all an infant's wonder.

Then the Virgin said : "Give me from thy rolls
Of sacred writing, the sweet book of Ruth.
We can not now, I think, be distant far
From where she and Naomi once abode."

He did as she requested. By the spring
He stretched his limbs along the flowery sward,
And soon was sunk to slumber. Jesus, too,
Upon his Mother's lap fell deep asleep.

Then sitting on that lone hill-top, with scroll
As yet unopened in her hand, there came
A meditative mood upon her soul,
Which led her fancy back to times remote,
And bade her spirit brood with dove-like wings
Upon the black chaotic waves which once
Billowed dark-surgings o'er the formless void.
Then thought she of the flood, the drifting ark,
The waters rising o'er the highest hills,
Of Noah and his sons, and the long tract
Of intervening time till her own days;

And how from evil good was still evolved,
And how from fields of poisonous bitter weeds,
A charming flower had sprung—and that was Ruth.
From Ruth, the Moabitess, Obed came,
From Obed Jesse, and from Jesse him
Who slew Goliath with a pebble-stone.
Thus link by link the golden chain was forged,
Which drew down God's own essence from above,
To purify the moral atmosphere,
To scathe or heal, to wither or revive.

Then opened she the writing in her hand,
And while the sleepers slumbered 'neath her eye,
And while the goldfinch fed her hungry young,
And while sweet lady-birds sat on her page,
And whilst a distant Pan's pipe tuned the air,
She read, now hushed, now humming to herself,
The sweetest pastoral story ever penned.

And more than once she turned her glance aside
From the old Hebrew words beneath her eye,
To mark the manly form of him who lay
Stretched out among the flowers beside the spring.
Her earthly guide and guardian was he.
How noble looked his features e'en in sleep,
How grand, how innocent, how free from guile,

How fearless and how manly. As a friend
Sent down from heaven she looked upon him then,
And silently thanked heaven for *such* a friend ;
And in her inmost heart she felt for him
As she had felt for Holy Gabriel, when
He came t' announce, of all events, the greatest,
The birth of HIM who should renew the world.
A spirit-sympathy united them,
And held them spellbound in a golden world,
Like that which came before the silver one,
And banished from their hearts all earthiness,
And placed them in a second Paradise,
An Eden, which moved with them as they moved,
Stood when they stood, and breathed around them
airs

From heaven, and bathed them in the lustral founts,
Which flow invisible from God's own throne,
And drew around them, everywhere they went,
An angel's magic circle, o'er whose bounds
No wanton thought, no evil influence,
Dare for a moment enter.

Thus she mused,
And read and mused, in lonely wakefulness,
The dear ones sleeping near her. Calm and sweet

The minutes followed minutes, till two hours
Had made the shadows longer. Then her guide,
Refreshed and vigorous, roused himself from sleep,
And soon their wandering commenced anew.



BOOK VI.
BORDER-LAND.
(*Continued.*)



CANTO I.

THE SERPENT.

FOR hours they travelled o'er that border-land,
Half desert and half prairie, till their shadows,
Aye lengthening as the afternoon advanced,
Sloped eastward, growing longer every step.
Joseph, refreshed by his noonday sleep,
And by the bread and wine the children brought,
And by the holy singing on the hill,
Was blithe beyond his wont. Like roses glowed
His healthy cheeks, like altar-lights his eyes ;
His face at no time was like moon eclipsed
Made sombre by earth's shadow—it was like
The sun of spring, which loves to fringe with gold
Or silvery gauze each cloud that intervenes
Between himself and this, our mortal home.
If saint-like ever, then most saint-like he,
When bursting into smiles. The clear-obscure
Of full-orbed manhood ever made him ready

To weep with those who wept, and laugh with those
Whose hearts o'erflowed with joy. The Mother-maid
Was tempered also thus ; e'en when at times
A pensiveness came o'er her, making her droop,
The falling tear quick turned to gleaming pearl ;
An infant's laugh, or sudden smile from HIM
Or him, quick brightened up her cheek,
Her eye, and made her full of holy mirth,
Like weeping-elm when sunrise glistens through it,
Or like a weeping-willow seen in May,
When passing showers besprinkle it with drops,
And sun and rain contend for mastery.
At last they reached a sandy, circular plain,
More than a score of arrow-flights across
From end to end. Within its centre rose
An isolated rock, which seemed as 't were
A natural pyramid which antique art
Had excavated into halls and rooms,
And used it as a temple. Fivescore feet
Or more it rose above the sandy cirque.
Thither the travellers wended, both for rest
And water, hoping there to find a spring ;
For Joseph had beheld a palm-tree near,
And knew that when on sandy spots that tree

Is seen, a fount is not far off. As onward
With silent pace they moved, and with slow step,
The hot sun blazing with declining ray,
In horizontal splendor o'er the sand,
It seemed to Joseph like a faint foretaste
Of deserts farther south, deserts immense,
Which they were doomed to pass.

Reaching the rock,

They found beside its base an olive-tree,
A wild one, old and knotty, dry and gnarled,
Whose roots, intertwined in the crevices,
Drew thence their scanty nurture. The old rock
Had rough, rude steps cut on three sides of it,
Which led respectively to three niched seats,
Affording thus a chance, to those who scaled it,
Of shelter from the sun or driving rain.
Beneath its base upbubbled a scant spring,
Which, trickling onwards, scarce reached eighty
yards

Ere it was swallowed up by thirsty sands.
Around the rock, and by the slender rill,
Some spots of green refreshed the eye fatigued,
Some blossoming oleanders, a few brooms,
And one poor, barren fig-tree. But what most

Caught the lone wanderer's gaze in that wild place,
Was an unmated palm-tree—barren too.
Add to these plants some twining, prickly stems,
A score of sweetbriers with more spines than flowers,
And a few specimens of that thorny vine
From which, in after years, a crown was woven
For Jesus' Holy Brow—and you have all—
Save growth of little wild-flowers in the grass,
Tiny in size and inconspicuous,
But, when minutely scanned, most beautiful.
Such was the prospect near—but far away,
To one upperched upon that airy rock,
Northeastward rose tall mountains veiled in mist
Beyond the lake of Sodom.

Arrived—the ass, unsaddled, was turned loose
To wander 'midst the grass and flowers at will,
When Joseph, swift (for he was smit with thirst),
Took from his travelling-sack a drinking-cup
(A golden cup it was, most rich and bright—
One of the many presents from the kings
Who travelled from the East to see their Lord),
And, placing it some minutes in the spring,
To cool the metal which the sun had warmed,
Bore it, untasted (though half-dead with thirst),

To the Madonna, standing 'neath the palm.
Then she, though equally athirst and faint,
With not one drop yet tasted, held it quick
To His lips, whence aye living waters flow,
And ever shall flow whilst this earth endures,
And ever after.

The Holy Infant drank, the Mother drank,
Then gently passed it to the foster-sire,
Who quaffed all that remained—then went for more—
Such sweet, unselfish interchange of love
United those three innocent hearts in one.

Longer this time he loitered by the spring,
Cooling his heated wrists, and culling flowers.
When he returned, how great was his affright,
To view the Virgin Mother, with her face
Turned fountwards, and her eyes uplift to heaven,
Like one in holy trance ; whilst by her side,
Somewhat behind her, sported the Child-God,
All fearless on the grass ; a monstrous snake
Behind them, vast in bulk, and venomous,
Darting a triple tongue, lay there upcoiled,
All ready for the spring.
Quick, quick as thought, gaining his wonted force,
Then Joseph reared his pilgrim's staff aloft,

And striking the poisonous monster on the head,
With one blow dashed out its life. With a start
Then Mary looking suddenly around
Beheld the prostrate snake, upsnatched her Child,
And clasped him to her breast, with pallid cheek,
And limbs all over trembling.

Joseph, meanwhile, grasping a fallen branch,
Lifted the ghastly serpent from the ground
In part, in part he trailed it by the brook
(The tail still wreathing with remains of life),
And tossed it in the thorns.
Another brimful cup he then scooped up,
And bade the Blessed Virgin pour it on
His outstretched hands. The lustral wave, down-
poured

By an Immaculate Virgin, did its work
Of cleansing, and, the whilst it did so,
Thought it a type, a symbol of much good.
And then his trusty pilgrim's staff he laid
Within the brook, some distance from the spring,
Lest one small drop of venom might pollute it,
There to be cleansed by holy water's power.

This done, with one spontaneous act, they both
Knelt on the sward, and both with clasped hands,

Close side by side, praised God with fervid prayer.
Then up the rock they mounted, step by step,
He bearing in his arms, with tenderest care,
His sacred charge.





CANTO II.

KEDAR, THE WILD HALF-BREED.

NOT many minutes passed before he spied
A figure moving fleetly o'er the sands,
And making towards the rock. It was a lad,
Who might have numbered twice seven years per-
haps,

Unkempt and wild in his appearance. He
Bestrode a piebald mule, whose springy hoofs
And fine elastic pasterns bore him on,
Wind-swift, across the sand ; no saddle had he,
His only bridle-reins, a halter, made
Of firmly-twisted fibres of the palm.
The mule was painted (all by nature's hand)
With fine fantastic flecks and curious stripes,
Much like a zebra. Bare-armed was the lad,
Bare-legged, bare-footed, with a kerchief red
Wound round his elfish locks ; an ostrich-plume
Waved jauntily above his swarthy brow ;

A bow of wild-goat's horn was in his hand,
 And on his back a well-filled quiver hung.
 Sometimes before, sometimes behind him ran
 A fleet-foot dog, that seemed of mingled blood,
 Half greyhound and half shepherd. Stopping 'neath
 The rock, the boy, with ringing shout, called out :
 " Hail, father, peace be with thee " ; then said, in
 haste :

" I am in search of mules and asses gone
 Astray ; since yester eve they wandered off ;
 Mayhap hast seen them in thy journeying ? "
 " I have not seen what seemed to be stray mules
 Or asses," was the answer. " I must find them,"
 The lad replied ; " the hunt commenced, must be
 Continued. O the cursèd runaways !
 Azazel foul confound them ! Ha ! I see
 Thou hast a handsome beast. As white as milk,
 With tapering limbs and fine-turned head. What
 boot " —

Here he laughed merrily,—" what boot, what boot ?
 My mule is almost worth her weight in gold.
 Oh, thou shouldst see her when we hunt gazelles !
 Down steepest hills full speed she gallops on,
 O'er rolling stones or sliding, slippery sand.

She can outstrip the ostrich. Say, wilt trade?"
"Not I," said Joseph, smiling. "Ishmaelite—
Not so?" "Not quite," replied the lad; "I am
By some called a wild half-breed, living here
On the edge o' the border-land. My mother was
Born in a tent, and lived for sixteen years
A wanderer o'er the sands. A jolly life!
A wild, aye-roving tent life, that's the life
For me. My father owns a farm-house; he
Takes more delight to doze away his days
Beneath his vines and fig-trees. Thrice a year
He journeys to Jerusalem to pray,
And offer sacrifice, and free-will offerings,
And tithes, and firstlings of the flock and field.
Tell me, dost know the name of yonder fount?"
"Indeed I do not," answered Joseph; "tell me."
"The Fount of Halves. Twelve hours it runs, and
twelve
Ebbs down to nothing; nay, more; half the year
It flows in this half-wise and half goes dry.
A niggard fountain-head it may be called.
No wonder here a barren olive stands,
A barren fig-tree there, a barren palm
Yonder. Good heavens! there's something glitter-
ing there

Beside the spring. A drinking-cup. Ho ! ho !
How beautiful ! Pure gold, pure gold—how rich ! ”

Whereat he slid flash-quick down from his mule,
Seized the rich prize, and eyed it round and round,
Gazing upon it swift without, within ;
Then dipped it in the spring, and drank, and gazed,
And gazed and drank again with deep delight.

“ Whence came it ? ” then he asked, with eagerness.

“ Was it the work of sprites in some far land
Nearer the rising sun ? Its work embossed
Enchants me, and I dream of something strange
And new, and wonderful beyond all thought.
Magical—magical, ay, that ’s the word.
I ’ve heard strange stories told beside the fire
At night by camel-drivers, when they pause
To rest upon the sands ; stories most strange,
Of genii and enchanters, far renowned,
Who, by their skill, make things of potent charm,
Which even spirits obey. Is this one
Of those wonder-working talismans ? But, no,
My foolish fancy oft leads me astray.
’T is a rich drinking-cup, and nothing more.
Now listen, stranger, I will give you for it

My mule, my dog, my bow, my ostrich plume,
All that I have, for this one drinking-cup."

"Not for all these, and all thy father owns
Besides in land, in flocks, in herds, in grain,
With ten times more added to the full sum,
And ten times ten times all owned by the tribe
From which your mother sprang, could all this be
Massed in one heap, and all that heap increased,
By some strange magic power, a hundred-fold,
I would not let you have that drinking-cup.
It has a history belonging to it."

"Do tell me that strange history," said the lad;
"I'd give my mule to hear it."

"I dare not tell it," was the quick reply.
"Not? Then the swiftest and the cunningest
Shall bear it off as prize." And as he spoke
He vaulted on his mule, with cup in hand,
And, standing upright on the creature's back,
As does a clown in some equestrian cirque,
He held it up with archly winking face,
In which sly roguery and daring fun
Were blended equally, then slipt adown
Into his seat, and shouting to the mule,
Off like the wind he scampered. Bowshots two

In length he raced along the sands, then wheeled,
And posting back with the same madcap pace,
Just 'neath the spot where Joseph stood, drew rein.
Again he stood up clown-like on the beast,
Which stopt as still as any marble mule,
And on his face were pictured curiously
Commingled moods and swiftly-passing trains
Of varying emotions, shifting ever :
Whim, fun, deep inborn gift of thievery,
Sucked in with mother's milk ; and mixed with these,
A trace or two of pious reverence
(Perhaps caught from his father).
He waved the cup aloft and said aloud :
" How easy even now this cup were mine.
Behold yon wooded hills skirting the south,
I know each winding glen and narrowing gorge,
And every cave and hiding-place among them,
Where sheltering I might lurk, and thence might
reach
The pathless wilderness. This thing would then
Be mine, and Kedar, all the rest of life,
Most rich in flocks and herds. The sale of this
Would give me wherewithal to purchase mares
Of purest Arab blood, and dromedaries,

And tents and wives, and make me, ere my death,
Like one of those rich patriarchs that we read of,
Who lived in olden times, as tells the Book.
With such a start, wealth like the wealth of Job
Would soon pour in. Now, Kedar 's a poor lad,
With naught but mule and dog and dancing plume,
With goat-horn bow and quiver ; poor, but honest—
Poor Kedar ! honest, simple-hearted Kedar.”

 This saying, with tears and laughter strangely
 mixed,

He held the cup aloft, and Joseph, stepping
Down the stone stairs, placed in his hand a coin
Of shining gold, and on his head his hand
He laid, and blessed him thrice with eyes upraised.
The boy, with look subdued and eyelash sunk,
Received the kindly blessing ; then he wiped
A trickling tear from off his tawny cheek,
And once again dismounted from his mule,
While Joseph step by step slow journeyed upward.
Kedar with quick eye glanced from him to the top,
And viewing there the loveliest face unveiled
That ever yet his eye had lit upon,
His Orient fancy, kindling to full glow,
Took her for spirit dropt from highest heaven ;

And when, as in a trance he saw her gazing
Far, far away across the sands, across
The stagnant waters of the Sea of Death,
With eye fixed on the Mount where Moses died,
Kedar no longer could withstand—he sank
Upon his tawny knees and worshipped her.
This was the turning-point in Kedar's life.
Glance we a moment at his after-years
As vision represents them to the view.
The touch of Joseph's hand, his deep-toned voice,
His blessing and his prayer commenced the change,
And drove some evil demons from his breast ;
Then, the remembrance of an honest deed,
Of a temptation nobly overcome,
Soothed his whole being with a joy ne'er felt
Before in his wild life ; good feelings took
The place of wicked ones expelled ; and then
The sight of that all-lovely Lady on
The Mount, built up the keystone of the arch
Of his conversion from a semi-savage
To a true, honest man. Soon all his ways
Were other than they had been, all his thoughts.
His father, seeing the happy change commenced,
Did all he could to foster it. He sold

His frontier farm and travelled to the north ;
With joy he left the reckless border-land,
And settled in the quiet hill-country
Not many miles from Hebron.

Kedar there

Became in time a husbandman so true,
So honest, upright, and so holy-hearted,
That all men far and near respected him.
For wife he gained a pious Hebrew maid
Untainted by a drop of Ishmael's blood.

When he had reached his seven and fortieth year,
Kedar, as was his wont, with all his tribe,
Went to Jerusalem to celebrate
The Passover. His ample tent he pitched
On holy Olivet on a high point,
From which a spacious prospect on all sides
Expanded to the view : the city seen
Across the brook of Kedron, holy Mount
Of Zion, and the Temple on Moriah,
All bright and hallowed objects to the eye,
And on the other side the salt Dead Sea.

One day, a memorable day for him,
He saw the Lord of Life and Light, enshrined
In human flesh. Then grew the change complete.

The wild, light-fingered rover of the sands,
Who had once borne the holy cup away,
And had returned it, changing ever still,
Now found the consummation of that change
Complete and most delightful. How HIS words
Refreshed, like morning dew, his open heart ;
How, as he heard them, did his spirit burn
Within him, as if live coals from the altar,
With holiest incense mingled, kindled him,
And made him long for heaven !

HIS words he heard,
Beheld His miracles, believed His power,
Received His blessing, and was blessed indeed.



BOOK VII.

THE GHOR.



CANTO I.

THE MANIAC.

A GAIN began their wanderings. Hour on hour,
While the sun upward clomb with torrid heat,
They threaded lonely labyrinthine glens,
A wilderness of rocks and crags and caves,
And dried up watercourses, where no blade
Of verdure shook, or patch of greenness smiled ;
Hot, solitary, silent, tempest-torn,
Where earthquake and fierce gusts had left their
mark,

Whirlwind and storms o'erblown. No eremite,
Smitten with love of loneliness, e'er chose
A wilder, more chaotic realm to brood in—
With skull and crucifix and scroll and beads,
Living on locusts and wild honey. Far
Above their heads at times an eagle swept,
Or peregrine falcon, perched on some high cliff,
Gazed on the awful scene with horrid screams,

Or carrion vulture with gyrations slow
Circled the dolorous region. Wilder 't was,
More awe-inspiring, more sepulchral, dead,
Than was the the terror-breathing wilderness
Between Jerusalem and Jericho.

Here, in a defile, most forlorn of all,—
Narrowed and overfrowned by fronting cliffs,
They saw a human being,—'t was their first
(If human being he could well be called
Whose intellect had been disordered quite),
Crouching upon a rock with frenzied stare.
He looked like one whom some o'erpowering woe
Had fallen upon, with such a sudden shock,
That the soul, once so full of joy, so full
Of love and ardor, had been wrenched and torn
Disjointed and untuned. He had not reached
The prime of manhood ; youthful was his form,
Symmetrical his features and his limbs ;
His curly locks neglected and unkempt
Showed what they once had been ;
And e'en the squalor of the maniac,—
E'en all the soil and strain of wildest travel,—
Could but o'ercloud, and could not quite conceal,
The youthful beauty which had flushed him once.

“Lurks danger there,” said Joseph, halting short ;
“I can discern it in his eye—how wild, how fierce !”

Therefore he paused and gathered all his power
For desperate conflict, should the event require it.
Uprose the maniac on the mossy rock,
Like some wild beast aroused from couchant pose,
And sprang with outstretched hands, as though he
meant

To clutch the Child and strangle Him forthwith,—
And would have done so, had not Joseph’s arm,
Strong as some warlike engine, hurled him back,
And dashed him down to earth. The demon-fit
Soon spent its fury, violent at first,
And still more violent, until it reached
Its destined crisis,—then there came a lull—
A languid, thought-bewildered pause,
As though the sufferer had been suddenly freed
From some great ill that tortured him. The Virgin
Had passed that fearful interval in prayer.
Her fervent prayer was heard. The evil spirit
That had possessed the man, and urged him on
Had fled, had left him. He was dispossessed.
A deep calm sleep then fell on the young man,
And though delay was dreadful to them there,

They waited in the shadow of the rocks,
Until he should awake. A twain of hours
Passed over them—the watchers and the watched—
Before he oped his eyes. Bewildered still,
But quiet, and quite free from violence,
He knew not where he was; his intellect
Had been so played upon by demon force,
So disarranged and wrenched,
That still his thoughts tossed wildly, like high waves
• After the storm has ceased.
Sometimes he wept, sometimes he groaned aloud,
And then exclaimed: “Some dread demoniac power
Had whispered to my heart, to kill that Babe,—
Herod has killed a thousand innocents—
Thy darling twins among them:—that the cause!—
Obtain revenge! obtain redress!”
He seemed to lapse into a wildered doze,
Then rousing, turned, and looked around him wildly,
And said: “Oh! what a picture do I see!
Boat-loads of innocent children on a stream!
Some laugh, some dance, some dip their hands in
water,
And some are looking upward, where a flock
Of cherubs, sweet, are floating on the breeze,

Dropping down flowers, the which, with uplift hands,
The lovely boat-boys fondle."

Then again

The rescued maniac closed his dreamy eyes,
And sank into a pleasant picturing sleep,
Brimful of visions lovelier than the last.

Then Joseph and his Mary kneeled adown
Beside the sleeping man, and each by turns
Prayed fervently. Their prayers were surely heard,
They knew they were; for when he waked again,
He said "Amen," and looked quite calm though
mournful,

Then fell upon his knees and prayed to God,
And fell upon his face and worshipp'd Christ.

Then all three travelled on toward the south,
Threading those lonely, labyrinthine glens,
That wilderness of rocks and crags and caves,
Which form the margin of the far-famed Ghor.

To make the road less wearisome, they asked
The rescued man to tell his history;
And he, in simple language, thus complied:

"My name is Zadoc. I was born and reared
In Bethlehem, by some called David's town.
My father was a mason all his life,

And worked in brick and stone. In this same trade
He brought me up. I helped him at his work.
He likewise sent me many years to school,
Where I was taught the ancient Hebrew tongue,
And learned the lore of numbers. Great the joy
I felt in solving problems intricate,
In searching after unknown quantities
By a few given known ones.
Nor were the sports of youth distasteful to me;
Body and mind were kept in exercise—
Aiding each other in alternate play,
Both agile, both delighted. Often, too,
I wandered o'er the pastoral vales around,
And saw the rosy children of the hills,
And sported with the damsels and their lambs.
Of these—one named Salome—she pleased me most.
The only daughter of a herdsman. Rich
He was in cattle and in flocks of sheep.
Called Zebulon the pious. From that time
Nor lettered scroll, nor prophet's holy words,
Nor figures cyphered on the brook-side sands,
Nor work with trowel, hammer, plumb, or saw,
Nor hunting in the mountains, was so sweet,
So charming to my soul as were her words,

Her smile, her presence when she silent sat.

“We were betrothed—espoused. Then happy days
For us! Too heavenly happy to endure!
She became mother of a pair of boys—
(Twins) lovely as herself, and so alike
That e’en a parent’s eye could scarce discern
Aught different in form or feature. Oft
On to her native hills we took them, ’midst
Her father’s sportive lambs to gambol gay;
Or, seated on some lofty grass-clad mount,
We gazed upon our holy temple’s roof,
Gleaming with snow-white marble, from afar;
Or pointed out to their delighted eyes
The skylark soaring heavenward. Happy time!
Why need I longer dwell upon its joys?

“King Herod’s edict came! The soldiers came!
How many innocent babes were slaughtered then!
How many grief-stricken mothers’ hearts were wrung!
How many fathers moaned with agony!
How many hearts, once joyous, burst with woe!
How many then could not be comforted!—
I cannot, need not tell. The soldiers came!
The cruel soldiers came with bloody swords!—
I cannot tell the rest!”

Here in his hands
He hid his face, and bowed his head in grief,
Rocking with tremulous motion to and fro,
As if all joy of life had fled forever.
He sure had fainted from excess of grief
Had not the Virgin said, in sweetest voice.
"Zadoc! cheer up! Salome is in heaven;
Her twins are with her there; among the boys,
The rosy children floating in that boat
And catching at the flowers the angels dropt.
You saw them, Zadoc! rosy, fresh, and gay,
Borne happy down the lustral stream that runs
Beneath the tree of life. Cheer up! Cheer up!
A mason is a useful man on earth,
And may become a glad one, building up
Homes that may form the hallowed haunts of love,
And temples where the Lord may be adored,
And cisterns whither crystal waters flow,
And aqueducts to bear them archwise on,
And deep foundations, lofty turret tops,
And resting-places in the ancient rocks.
Cheer up! Cheer up!"

And Zadoc did cheer up
A little,—like a pensive, down-weighed flower,

Which hangs its drooping petals all day long,
As if it meant to die; but when night comes,
And sprinkles holy water on its bells,
It waves a little in the fragrant breeze,
And ever and anon peeps at the stars.

Again they journeyed through the wilderness,
And now had nearly reached the longed-for Ghor,
When the road deepening, led them down and down,
And growing ever narrower, grew more deep,
As though those gloomy gorges and black glens
Would fain have swallowed them. Sad journeying!

Erelong it somewhat widened, but the peaks
Grew loftier as they towered more far apart;
And through that opening they could see a vale,
Once a deep river-bed, now called the Ghor.
With joy the travellers marked it, and made haste
To reach its sandy bottom. Winding on,
The road at last conducted them beneath
The loftiest and the last of those tall peaks,
Capt on its summit by a toppling boulder,
Which had, for centuries, been balanced there—
Like some vast Druid stone, a-tilt and shaking
Upon its granite pivot—shaking, rocking,
E'en at the slightest touch—but yet could not,

By harnessed elephants, have been displaced.
The road they travelled wound right under it,
And just as they arrived full underneath,
Behold ! it shakes—it tilts—off-heaved it rolls—
It rolls adown :—What help, great God ! what help !
Help came. The guardian angel hovered near !
Wide of its mark the swooping boulder swerved,
And sweeping, like ten thousand thunderbolts
Down from the clouds, its whizzing breath was
felt—

Its breath was felt—it fell and did no harm.

The dread demoniac power that had possessed
The frame of Zadoc—he it was—the same—
That loosened from its point the rocking stone.

“ Oh ! how my heart within me leaps,” said Joseph,

“ As fervid fancy paints the coming time
When the great Lord of Life, and Light, and Bless-
ing,

Now shrined within an Infant’s feeble form,
Shall be the Lord Supreme of Earth and Heaven ;
When evil after evil shall be crushed
Like serpent after serpent, or rolled off
As was that loosened crag ! ”—

“ Or turned to good,”
Said the young mother, looking gently up ;
And, as she did so, darkness left the sun,
And e'en the barren Ghor appeared to smile.





CANTO II.

THE FOUNTAIN.

THEN onward o'er the sandy Ghor they went :
A caravan with spicery they met,
Slow journeying northward. Noon, with torrid heat,
Still saw them panting on. Hot afternoon,
With shadows slowly lengthening, pressed upon
them.

No water oozed up from the arid sands—
No spring gushed from the rocks. Dry, withering
thirst

Consumed them. Even Joseph's cheek began
To lose its wonted hue of ruddy health ;
Zadoc grew paler ; and the Virgin's lips
Were parched ; the Child was like a wilting flower.
So hour by hour passed by. The panting beast
Seemed ready to drop down upon the sands.

When almost fainting thus from weariness
They came to where a sidewise valley opened

Upon the ancient, dried up river-bed
Which they had traversed. There they found
Camels, and sheep, and mules, and half-dressed men,
Gathered around a fountain—all athirst—
All panting, like themselves—all mad to drink.
The scheik stood by the fountain, ordering all,
And regulating how each should be served,
Without or blows or clamorous violence.
Thus strove the scheik to govern appetite,
Issuing his orders to his officers,
And only half effecting what he wished.

Then Zadoc said to Joseph: "Good my lord,
Permit your servant to go through yon crowd,
And pressing onward to the master-man,
To beg a gourd of water, in all speed,
For a young Mother, fainting in the sun,
Lest she might pine away from thirst and die."

Then Joseph oped the sack and took the gourd,
And reached it to the young man in all speed,
Who forthwith pressed his way into the crowd,
Softly but firmly, making for the fount,
And telling all who stopped him, his great need.
His graceful form and handsome, pensive face
Were the sure keys that opened the dense crowd

And led him to the goal. He reached the spring,
Told, in few urgent words, his pressing wants
(Not on his own account)—but told for whom,
And instantly the dripping gourd, brimful,
Returned like bucket from a deep, cool well
And reached the Virgin's hand. With thanks to
Heaven

She gave the Child to drink, then drank herself,
And handed it to Joseph. Blessings warm
Came from those saintly lips before he drank :
Placing his hands upon the young man's head
He looked aloft to heaven, then quenched his thirst
And gave him back the gourd to go for more.

Again young Zadoc reached the fountain side
And having quenched his thirst, talked with the
scheik,

As men who meet in deserts learn to talk :
With truthfulness and yet with reticence.
The scheik was so much wrought on by his grace,
His voice, his pleasant ways, and pensiveness,
That, seeing how his garb was torn and soiled
(The sad reminders these of conquered madness),
He begged him take new garments of his own,
Which in a tent anear were stored away

Ready for future use. Young Zadoc took,
With many thanks, the gift ; the scheik himself
Went tentward with him, bade him don the clothes,
And, bidding him adieu, saw him depart
New-garbed, fresh-washed, refreshed from crown to
sole.

He also gave him in his sack good store
Of bread, wild honey, and of Syrian figs.
All which the young man took with heartfelt thanks.
With grief still weighing on his youthful lids
Zadoc passed through the crowd. The gaping crowd
Beheld the marvel, marked the wondrous change,
Observed his beauty, marked his sorrows too,—
And wondered what the passing show might mean.

With smiles the travellers greeted his return ;
So like a sorrowing angel seemed he then
To those who had beheld him in despair,
In squalor and abasement. On they moved
With thankful hearts and tuneful tongues ; oft-times
Some holy-joyous melody would lift
Their hearts above the earth they trod upon,
Coming from music realms like airs of spring
Laden with unsought sweetness.

Towards eve

They reached another green-clad lateral vale
And left the Ghor, there to encamp for night.
A brooklet tinkled down it from a spring—
Whence all its greenness. There they found before
 them

A prostrate plane-tree, lying by the rill,
O'eturned perhaps by earthquake. Large and far
Its trunk extended on the riven soil,
With many branches torn, and some entire.

Then Joseph took his hatchet from the sack,
And lopping off the boughs, he formed a booth,
Which he and Zadoc reared upon the mound
Beside the brooklet—pleasant sleeping-place
For the Madonna and her Holy Son.
How happy both the men appeared at work,
One mason and the other carpenter,
Both handicraftsmen deft, and both informed
With the full spirit of their several trades—
True eye, quick hand, and sense of fair proportion,
Both took for emblems,—compass, square, and rule,
Which, even when they held them not in hand,
Governed their motions, like a man's, whose creed,
Not always on his tongue, ne'er leaves his heart.

There on the grassy mound, beside the booth,

They took their supper by the setting sun,
Calm was the scene and quiet ruled the hour.
The tethered ass, unburthened, cropt the sward.
The moon arose and showed her crescent form.
A nightingale sat in a thorny tree
Charming night's ear with music. Zadoc's soul
Received its còlor from its company ;
As the sward took its verdure from the brook
That trickled through it. Soon he fell asleep.
The Virgin to her balmy booth retired
And couched her limbs on flowers and fragrant grass.
Joseph, beside the watch-fire, sat, absorbed
In lofty thought, for many a long hour.



BOOK VIII.

PETRA.



PETRA.

THREE days they journeyed down the Ghor,
The fourth, as evening shades began to fall,
More crowded grew the highway : seemed it then
They were approaching some metropolis,
Some popular city, where wild Edom's king
Held sway o'er desert wanderers. Caravans,
Some parting, some arriving, came and went ;
Here—they were lifting stakes and packing tents ;
There—forming an encampment for the night.
Here—bands of sun-burnt horsemen spurred their
steeds

Town-ward, with store of game, or captives bound ;
There—round some way-side fountain, on their knees
The patient camels waited, till their loads
Should be removed, or, quiet, chewed the cud ;
The whilst long lines of women, single file,
With pitchers on their shoulders, forward tript,

Chanting some old-world ballad.

Once a band
Of merry youths, on Arab chargers mounted,
In wantonness of sport, spurred on amain
Full gallop on the travellers, shouting loud
As though they meant to trample them to earth;
But sudden, reined up short, and, whirling round
With tufted spear-heads flashing, off away
They scoured across the sands.

Down sank the sun;
The moon unclouded rose. Now they were joined
By one, who, travelling with quicker steps,
Had overtaken them; a comely youth.
He answered all their questions courteously.
“The city you are travelling to,” he said,
“Is Edom’s royal seat, by some called Sela,
By others Petra: built among the rocks,”
“I have a kinsman there,” said Joseph,
“Obed;
“By birth an Israelite. Perhaps thy kindness
Will guide us to his dwelling.”

“Gladly will I.”

Then turning from the highway, suddenly,
By slightly trodden paths, he led them on

Beneath the quiet moon, until he reached
 A downward sloping gorge, which wound among
 High cliffs of various color. These were scooped
 Into a thousand curious antique tombs,
 Tomb above tomb, from base to dizzy tops,
 Such as may still be seen ; the burial-place
 Of by-gone times and nations passed away.

Deeper the sloping glen, taller the cliffs,
 More thronged these sepulchres, the way more dark.
 Bordering their path, a roaming mountain-stream
 Sent up a voice of wail among the tombs.
 And, often, o'er some dizzy bridge they passed
 Which spanned a water-fall. It seemed as though
 They were down-stepping, by a sombre gorge,
 To some infernal city, weird and wild,
 Inhabited by demons.
 A mile in length this dolorous passage stretched,
 When lo ! the tortuous gorge came to an end.
 A tall black mountain seemed to block the way
 And bar all further passage. Some suspicion
 Of their guide's faith arose in Joseph's mind,
 But vanished when he paused and struck a bell ;
 And, magic quick, an unseen door flew open,
 And lo ! the sight and sound of living men.

A sweet surprise ! an open space, with rocks,
Which, wide-expanding, made a gay-lit square.
The wailing stream had widened to a lake ;
Lanterns of many hues, some high aloft
On masts, some near to earth, lit up the banks ;
And gaily painted boats upon the wave,
With laugh of youths and maidens, and sweet songs,
Were floating 'neath the moon. Gardens were there,
Small, beautiful, and loud with nightingales ;
Beyond these, lofty walls of stone arose,
Not like those seen before, with silent tombs
From base to summit sculptured, but abodes
They seemed of happy men and gentle beasts
Safe-housed among those stony fastnesses.

The gardens and the slopes around the lake,
With all their winding walks and shrubberies,
Their plots of level green, and balsam trees,
Seemed like the city's play-grounds. Dancing girls,
With sweet-toned bells upon their ankles white,
Displayed their merry measures to a crowd
Ranged in an amphitheatre, with seats
Rising o'er seats, all open to the moon.

In sooth there was a festival that night
To celebrate some ancient victory, won

On the ensanguined sands.

The travellers moved

As in a dream, so wondrous was the scene,
After those lonely glens and mountain gorges.
Their guide next led them on through many streets,
Where scattered lights twinkled on balconies,
Or where, through some wide-open portal, shone
Illuminations, far within the rocks ;
Leading imagination to depict
Strange subterranean revels, dances wild
Of gnomes and fairy wassailers. At last
The young man made a sudden pause and said :
“ Here Obed lives ; yon steps cut in the rock
Will lead you to his door. Stay—all is dark ;
Perhaps he sleeps. I will ascend and call.”

Two servants presently, with lamps in hand,
Opened the mansion door ; and then a man
Of venerable seeming, grave and tall,
His head enwrapt in a rich turban, stept
To the porch-front and asked—Who sought his
home ?

Then Joseph told his name, and that he was
The old man's brother's son, not seen for years,
And now, perhaps, scarce held in memory ;

How he had fled from Herod's cruelty;
Concealing, at the same time, carefully
All mention of the wondrous mystery
Of which he kept the secret.

The old man

Listened with secret curiosity,
But age and wealth had made him timorous: he
Welcomed his nephew with cold, formal words,
Saying, that as his purpose, one day, was
To travel back to Judah, 't were unsafe
To wake suspicion in the jealous king.
"Do thou, my kinsman, take this piece of gold,
And seek the shelter of some decent inn;
And, on the morrow, I will visit thee."

Then Joseph winced, as if with sudden pain;
"Shame on thee!" he began—but very shame
Hindered his further speech: he turned to go.
It chanced, this moment, Mary raised her veil,
And Obed caught one glimpse of that fair face,
And of the Infant nestling in her arms.
His heart was strangely moved, he knew not why;
His eyes grew dim with unaccustomed tears;
Then down the steps he tottered, fast as age
Could bear him, seized upon his kinsman's hand,

Begged his forgiveness, bade him enter in
With Mary and the Child.

The house was full

Of servitors, obedient to the beck
Of those their master favored. At a hint
From Joseph that the lady needed rest
After her weary travel, Obed bade
An aged female slave conduct her steps
To the chief guest-chamber ; and wondering much
She followed up those stairs hewn in the rocks,
With chambers niched on either side, the while
Ran in her mind an ancient song: " My dove
That sittest in the crevice of the rocks,
And in the secret places of the stairs."
The room assigned her crowned the topmost ledge
Of all the rocky wall ; the stars of night
Looked down through a wide opening in the roof,
Which could, in time of storms, be tightly closed.
Sweetly they slept among those ancient rocks
Watched by the stars, and fanned by God's own
 breath,
She and the Holy Child.

Meanwhile below,

Joseph, now glad of heart, set free his breast,

And told his kinsman all the wondrous tale.
And Obed listened, marvelled, and believed.

Ere morning's sun had waked the weary guests,
The old man's thoughts were hovering round the
theme

Which had so moved them on the night before,
And still to him it seemed more wonderful,
The more he brooded on it.

His whole life,
Now fourscore, by the count of passing years,
And hardened into selfish love of pelf,
One glance had, by a sudden flash, transformed
From carbon into diamond. Wonderful
It was, almost beyond belief or thought.
Grand thoughts, grand schemes, before undreamt
of, 'gan

To shoot and vegetate in his old brain,
Like Eucalyptus trees, within a marsh,
Absorbing all miasma, sprouting up
With leaves that drop down dews of healing balm,
And fill the country round with blessed shade.

Some days they spent among the caverned homes
Of that strange city: happy days they were.
Petra was then alive—a busy mart ;

Of many caravans the halting-place ;
 Of some the goal. It teemed with life and trade.
 The Greek, the Jew, the Roman, mingled there
 In business, all intent on fortune's quest.
 The traveller who sees it now, sees tombs
 And excavated rooms, untenanted,
 And Arab shepherds with their errant flocks ;
 The transient haunt of roamers, fiercely armed.

These saw it all alive. The morning meal
 Was scarcely over, ere that merchant old,
 With slow and thoughtful steps, conducted them
 Along the main and busiest street of all,
 Oft pointing out the intersecting ways
 To right or left—all in like fashion built.
 The many-colored stone on either side,
 Story on story scooped from solid rock,
 Home piled on home, in high and airy poise,
 With columns, with pilasters, balconies,
 And here and there a monolithic fane,
 Where Nabuthean Arabs met to pray
 To such Gods as they ignorantly worshipp'd.

He took them then to view the marts of trade,
 The vast bazaars—thick thronged with purchasers ;
 Where richest Orient strewed her gems,

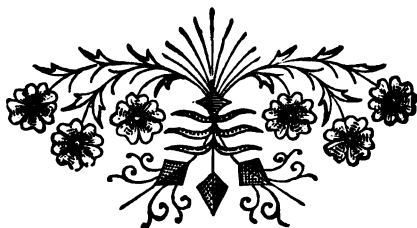
Her woven tissues and her spiceries,
Her perfumes and her costly works of art.

Of all such treasures, Obed owned good store ;
No kind of commerce was untried by him,
And all he traded in, by some strange luck,
Some curious alchemy, none understood,
Turned into gold.

Early next morning,
The merchant and his nephew spent an hour
In earnest converse—when, all suddenly,
The door was opened, and a messenger,
Draped in a foreign garb, was ushered in ;
Who, three times bowing, with deep reverence,
Gave Joseph a sealed letter, and retired.

And Joseph brake the seal, and read these words:
“Come to me, brother of my soul, come now.
The truthful stars have told me thou art here.
Like water-brook to panting desert hind,
Such thou to me, my brother. At the door
A steed awaits thee, and a servitor.
Then tarry not, but mount, and come to me.”
First to himself, and then aloud, he read
The friendly missive. Then some words there passed
’Twixt him and Obed, then, with speed, he stept

To a side chamber, where the Virgin sat,
 Absorbed in silent thought. She took it, read it,
 Then gazed upon the seal, a strange device :
 A woman crowned with stars, and bearing in
 Her arms a Child, and standing on the moon.





BOOK IX.

PETRA.

(Continued.)



CANTO I.

THE WISE MAN FROM THE EAST.

JOSEPH, meantime, without another word,
Stept through the door, and, straightway, saw
before him

A horse of snow-white color, glossy bright,
And trapt with rich caparison ; the reins,
Of costliest silk, had golden letters on them
In an unknown Eastern tongue. The messenger
Who had conveyed the letter, held the horse,
And when the pilgrim mounted, reined his own,
And rode, before, down many a winding street,
By many a sculptured palace front, up-piled
Story on story towering overhead.

The city crossed, they reached the wall of cliffs
Which bordered on the desert—and, ere long,
At a gray gate, which seemed part of the rock,
The guide drew rein ; it opened,—in they rode,—
And Joseph, lifting up his eyes, beheld,

A far receding opening in the rocks,
Here wider, and there narrower, stretching back
In lengthening perspective.

Nowhere else
In all well-watered Petra had he seen
Of that pure element so free a flow ;
So many brooks, so many water-falls,
So many lakelets, filled with lotus leaves,
So many gardens and sweet fountains in them.
To right, to left, clear rillelets tumbled down
With voices musical, with jocund leaps.
To right, to left, high up among the rocks
Were spots of greenery.

And then the rocks !
Painted by nature's pencil, of all hues,
From deepest crimson up to palest pink.
Wondering at so much beauty, Joseph rode
Through all that varying play-ground of delight,
Until he reached an emerald expanse,
Where grew only two tall Palmyra palms,
The finest of their kind. Beyond the palms
Twelve steps of purest marble, white and clear,
Led upward to a richly sculptured gate,
Which opened in the rocks.



*That I may worship Him again, as once
At Bethlehem:*

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On the portico

There stood a form majestic. On his head
A diadem, flashing with Orient gems,
Gleamed o'er his ample front. A zodiac belt,
With astronomic signs depicted o'er,
Girded his waist. Around his limbs was draped,
With flowing folds, a star-enspangled robe.

He seemed a man whose outward earthly mould
In pure humanity's most perfect type
Had, from the first, been cast ; nor ever marred.
E'en age had neither bowed his lofty form,
Nor wasted all his manly comeliness.
Decay had mellowed, but not overthrown
The temple of his spirit. Still his step
Was firm, his form erect, and still his eyes
Beamed luminous beneath unfurrowed brows.

" Welcome, thrice welcome to my rocky lair !
The stars have prophesied of thee to me,
And planets told thy coming. On the morrow
I pray thee bring the Holy Child to me
That I may worship Him again, as once
At Bethlehem. Often I see again
Those bands angelic,—hear their hallowed songs,—
Behold the shepherds worshipping the Child.

I see my two companions from far lands,
To eastward, meeting at a single spot,
Each led by a different star to the same place ;
How then the three stars, all conveyed in one,
And how that Three-in-one thus led us on,
O'er mountains and o'er valleys, ever west."

The audience chamber reached, they took their
seats

Beside a marble table circular.
And cup-bearers, unbidden, brought them wine
More precious than the juice which after days
Ripened at Shiraz, blent with water, cool,
And pure, as that from famed Choaspes stream,
So loved by kings and monarchs of the East.

Much wondering, Joseph prayed his courteous host
To tell him somewhat of his life.

" I come,"

The Magian answered, " from an ancient line
Of kings who ruled Chaldea ;
Kings and astrologers, in those far times,
When men were wiser than they are to-day,
Nobler and purer. Nature then, 't is said,
Spoke to them lovingly in many ways.
They understood the language of the birds,

The music of the stars. Thunder, some say,
Was then articulate ; the very trees,
As the winds played upon them, uttered voices
Oracular ; and oft, at dead of night,
Whilst meteors gleamed, and falling stars were seen
Gliding from heaven, strange, supernatural sounds,
Ne'er heard before on earth, appeared to float,
Now glad, now wailful, o'er the vocal sky,
Swooning away in distance.

“ Then sprang up
Those great astronomers of early time,
Whose names may still be read among the stars :
Wise Atlas, Uranus, Endymion,
Ninus, and patient Job. They read the stars,
As none have read them since. They heard them sing
As angels heard them on creation's morn.

“ Man's senses now are duller, or a veil
Has dropt 'twixt him and nature. But their lore
Has travelled down, in part, from age to age,
On clay impressed, marked on papyrus rolls,
Carven on obelisks and rocky walls,
Or veiled in mystic tales of poesy,
Few now can understand.

“ To this high order

Belonged my ancestors. Myself was born
At Passagorda. Whilst a boy, I played
Among the ruins of that sacred spot ;
Gazed on those palm-like columns ; often ran
With my companions up and down the stairs ;
Those lofty winding stairs, so broad and sloped,
That many horsemen (I have counted ten)
Can ride abreast, aloft, and ride adown.
My name you wish to know ? 'T is Abdel Caspar.

“ For two and twenty years did I remain
On Passagorda's holy mountain side,
Musing, and studying scientific lore.
There first I formed acquaintance with the stars,
Both wandering and fixed. There first I read
The Zend-Avesta, and impressed its laws
Too deeply on my mind to be forgot.
There I became the lover of sweet flowers,
And, wandering o'er that mountain, crescent-shaped,
Found ever new ones in my daily walks,—
New bells, new buds, new odors, and new tints ;
Knew when they op'ed their eyes, and when they
shut,

And which were most beloved by butterflies.

“ My father was my faithful friend and guide,

Companion and instructor. He, too, loved
Both stars and flowers ; to him they were as friends.
When I was but a child, my mother died.
My father never took another spouse.

“ When I had reached my two and twentieth year,
His love for travel, long repressed, revived ;
And off he went upon a distant journey,
Taking me with him. The old sacred order,
To which our house belonged, had, in the change
Of years and dynasties, sunk down full low ;
And now, by way of scorn, was called, by many,
The Fire Worshippers. Our priestly power
Had fallen, but still a great part of our wealth,
The accumulations of long centuries,
Remained to us. Of this, a part we hid
In a most secret spot, and took the rest
To use upon our travels. First we roamed
Between the Euxine and the Caspian,
And braced our limbs, for months, among the snows
Of the Caucasian mountains. Oh ! how keen
Became our spirits on those icy heights !
How holy seemed the element of Fire,
When, after hours of wandering, in the hut
Of some bold mountaineer, we warmed our limbs,

And fed the flames with pine wood ! Winter's self
Had not the power to draw us from those realms,
But seemed to bind us there by icy chains.

“ Spring came. We wandered south to Ararat,
Then lingered weeks in Susa, quaffing oft
The waters of Choaspes. Holy, then,
Appeared to us the element of water,
As fire had seemed before. God's creatures both—
Both perfect in their kind, both heavenly good.

“ Then Ecbatana, with its seven-fold walls,
Each wall of different hue, attracted us.
Seven happy weeks we spent there—all enchanted.
We felt like spirits living in a rainbow ;
And oft, it seemed, as though, chameleon-like,
We might have lived on air. There first we knew
What pure air means ; it means the breath of God,
Life-giving, joy-inspiring, breath of God.

“ From thence we travelled on, week after week,
Sometimes on foot, sometimes with caravans,
O'er deserts, mountains, hills, and boundless plains ;
Sometimes with hired guides, sometimes alone.
How many parasangs I cannot tell,—
Forever eastward.

We passed the Caspian gates, we passed the gates

Of Hecatompylos, whose name recalls
Great Alexander's long victorious march.
Old Bactra next we visited, the seat,
In ancient days, of learning and of wealth.
Thence on to Orlospana. Eastward then,
Passing unnumbered waters, large and small ;
Sometimes in ferry-boats, sometimes by fords,
Sometimes on slight rope-bridges, hung from rock
To rock—sliding in baskets, far above
The tossing cataract or yawning gorge.
We travelled fearless onward. Danger made
The journey all the sweeter. Savage beasts
Attacked us oft, and, oft, more savage men.
But, by Heaven's help and ready mother-wit,
We managed to escape.

“ Lo ! Eastward still,
Threading wild gorges, on we roamed
Toward the founts of Indus. Swallowed up
And lost in a vast labyrinth, we seemed,
Of peaks on peaks up-piled ; a chaos weird
Of ever loftier mountain tops. We clomb
O'er many a precipice and toppling crag
Until we reached Aornos, where some days
We spent above the clouds, and where, at night,

The stars seemed larger, nearer to the eye,
And more resplendent : joyful nights to us !

“ At last, quite wearied with such savage scenes,
Such awe-inspiring prospects, one calm eve
We came, all sudden, on a flowery land,
An earthly paradise, lockt in secure
By heaven up-starting peaks, peak behind peak,
White with eternal snows. The vale itself
Seemed like a vale, dropt down, all fresh, from
heaven ;

So sweet, so pure, so beautiful, it looked ;
Watered, from end to end, by a fair stream,
Which, here and there, spread out into clear lakes,
Each lovelier than the other. Near the largest
And farthest from the eye, we saw with joy
A most enchanting city, turret crowned,
With golden gates and domes all glittering bright.

“ It was the vale of Kashmir, as we learned
From one whom first we met. The crystal stream
That watered it, and gave it those sweet lakes,
Was, by the Greeks of Alexander's time,
Hydaspes called. These knew the stream alone,
The vale they never knew, nor ever knew
What loveliness they missed. Here first we found

How far beyond the reach of highest thought
Are some fair spots of earth,—of earth, the fourth
And last of the quaternion elements.

“ Fire, Water, Air, and Earth ! We now had seen
The three first in perfection. Here the last
Seemed waited on, seemed honored by the rest ;
Who, like the Graces three, engirt her round,
And did her service more than sisterly.
The sweetest showers that ever freshened air,
The purest air that e’er fanned holy fires,
The richest soil that ever nurtured plants,
Here did each other loving offices,
With interchange of kindness. Here we stood
In centre of the fourfold circles fair,
And, in that central spot, we fell adown
With foreheads to the earth, and worshipped God
For all His goodness to the sons of men.

“ What Eden could be lovelier. ’T was eve
When we arrived ; the sun had scarcely set.
We hastened toward the city by the lake.
The houses all had terraces upon them,
On which were planted flowers and blooming shrubs,
Citrons and fair palmettos. In the wave
These were reflected—O how fairy-like !—

The inverted pictures slightly tremulous
With crimson clouds above them, birds between
In flocks returning home.

“Two happy years
We spent in that delicious spot.”

Awhile
The Magian paused ; then spake, with altered voice :
“Too blissful was my joy—too keen my woe—
For repetition ! Here I found the maid
Who was the idol of my life—and here
I lost her.

“Long I travelled after this,
But not for love or pleasure. Earth was black,
And heaven was black, and memory’s keenest pangs
Were buried in my heart.

“My father’s age
Weighed heavy on him ; he had grown to love
The charming vale, and he resolved to end
His earthly days there. But on me he laid
His charge to travel much, see men and lands,
And wait the coming of my destiny.

“But for this time enough ! To-morrow come
And bring the Holy Child and Mary with thee.”



CANTO II.

THE SECOND ADORATION.

AT the appointed hour a letter came
For Mary and the Child and a led horse
For Joseph, and they sought the Magian's home.
It happened that the hour appointed was
The wonted one for the Child's noontide sleep.
Sleeping by the foster-father, He was borne
Within the fane, where some young acolytes
Were swinging censers round the odorous fire,
Before which stood the Magian himself,
In full pontificals. The acolytes
Were quietly dismissed, and none were left
Except the Magian and the Holy Family;
The Babe, Himself, still sleeping. On his face
The Magian prostrate fell, and cried aloud :
" Oh ! Holy, Holy, Holy Lord of Life !
Godhead incomprehensibly concealed
Beneath an Infant's form ! Supreme ! Supreme ! "

Then thrice he bowed submiss his jewelled head,
And thrice, on knees, he sank, and thrice arose,
And three times four his fuming censer swung
In sequence, turning to the quarters four
Of this our earthly star. Large wreaths of smoke,
The breath of richest spices, round him rolled ;
Each wreath, each globe illumined by the gleam
Of naphtha-lamps and blazing altar-fires,
Until his lofty priest-like form loomed large,
Breastplate and rich tiara glistening bright
Like galaxies, or like sheen polar-stars
Beheld through dancing streamers of the North.

“ Holy One, Holiest, Holiest Thou !
Light of all Light ! Power of all Power Supreme !
As glorious art Thou, now, as in that time
When myriad worlds, at Thy outspoken word,
Sprang into being, and the morning stars
Together sang for joy ! Power, all creative,
All constructive, all inventive, all
Untiring, slumbers in Thee still—Thou Child
With Godlike attributes ! Thou Child ! Thou God !
In heaven, on earth, on each most distant world
Thou now art present, warming, lighting all !
And yet—in Infant grace beneath mine eyes

Sweetly thou slumberest ! Wonder of Wonders this !

“Of twice ten thousand thunderbolts—the might ;
Of myriad cataracts—the roar and surge ;
Of countless water-floods—the whelming sweep ;
Of seas interminated—the vast strength ;
Of land-convulsing earthquakes—the dread force
Volcano-power and whirlwind-power combined,
Concentred (miracle divine, immense !)
Within a sleeping Infant’s roseate form !”

And thrice he fell, supine, upon his face,
And thrice he rose, and thrice he fell again,
Until his golden censer on the floor
Dropt from his hands neglected. Up he rose,
And then, like one rapt in poetic trance,
Or like a seer, who sees more than men see,
Hears more than men can hear, he thus resumed :

“Of coming times, the marvels—O how thick
They crowd in visionary forms before me !
From Thee, their primal source, they all outspring ;
Thy Name, through all the nations of the earth,
Shall thus be glorified ! Ships, I behold,
On stormy seas, in darkest, gloomiest night,
From port to port unerringly glide on,
Moving as surely o’er the watery waste,

As though the moon and constellations all
Sparkled in heaven to guide them !

“ Iron tracks,

I see, in net-work intricate, outspread
From port to port—a labyrinth of roads,
Crossing, recrossing, infinitely knit ;
And, on them, chariots of careering speed,
Like shuttles in a weaver’s ceaseless loom,
Weaving the web of endless intercourse,
From nation on to nation, round the globe.
O how, like living monsters, on they sweep,
Panting and yelling, still, with wild uproar,
Among the echoing mountains !

“ Wires, I see,

Threading the upper and the nether world,
And spreading o’er the bottom of the sea ;
Through which whole nations talk with lightning
 speed,
And lovers, though divided by deep oceans,
Whisper the inmost secrets of their hearts
Beneath the billowy surges !

“ Thee we praise,

As Conqueror, Creator, Priest, and King,
Source of all progress, Kindler of new arts,—

As Poet, Artist, Architect Divine !
Unnumbered lofty churches, spiring high,
With pictured windows and with clustering shafts,
Shall, over all the world, proclaim Thee King
Of all the spirit-realm ; sweet bells of towers
From pole to pole shall summon all the earth
To worship Thee with organ-peal and laud !

“ But, more than all, as Saviour of mankind,
Redeemer, Intercessor, Renovator,
Restorer of our nature—lapsed and fall’n,—
In fervid prayer, we lift our voices up,
Imploring Thee to wash us clean from sin !”

Then, with firm hands, and with calm countenance,
He took the rich tiara from his head,
Showing instead a forehead, broad and dom’d,
Bald on the shining top, but round beset
With snowy curllets, slightly glossed with yellow ;
More noble, in its native majesty,
As temple of the spirit, dome of thought,
Than when the Orient bauble had concealed it.
Then, one by one, he dropped his gorgeous robes
Pontifical—his breastplate, starry bright ;
His constellated zone, which round his waist
Gleamed like a zodiac ; then his stole, his bands ;—

All these, with gentle hands, he laid aside,
Neat-folded in a heap, and on the heap,
The rich tiara, crown and top of all :
And thus divested of his priestly pomp—
By his own hand divested,—he appeared
Clad in the garb of a pilgrim—pilgrim old,
But still robust and healthful, such as long
Has wandered up and down the earth, still bent
On wandering forth unwearied. Staff in hand,
And loins for travel girded, there he stood,
Before the saintly fugitives, prepared
To enter on his long, long pilgrimage.

“ Whither ? ” asked Joseph.

“ To the distant East.

By the sweet lake of Kashmir, is a cave
Where I have lived aforetime ; this fair cave,
Of all the places on the earth, to me
Is dearest, holiest, nearest to my heart,
And best adapted to a hermitage.
Thither my steps are bent. My plans are formed.
My wealth shall be bestowed in charity
By trusted stewards, whom I have instructed.
And all my days, remaining, shall be spent
In prayer and worship. Now that I have seen

The Day-Spring from on high, I count the hours
Till I shall be released ! And now farewell !”

A tear, then, many shed ; but Joseph thought :
“ E’en so, the High-Priest Aaron, as the Book
Informs us, when he journeyed to Mount Hor,
There to commence a longer, stranger journey,
Of all his priestly garments was bereft,
And stood, before the Lord, upon the mount—
His spirit travelling to a brighter land.”



BOOK X.
THE DESERT.



CANTO I.

THE CAMEL-BIRD.

THEIR journey o'er the desert ! Come and hear !
To them 't was new and strange, and all unlike
Aught seen before in all their wanderings.
Most generously their kinsman had provided
What e'er was needful for the Virgin's comfort.
But Joseph, spite his kinsman's urging, said
That he, on foot, would fare along the sands
From Akaba to Egypt. Step by step
He longed to trace the desolate wilderness,
Where his progenitors, for forty years,
Aye, to and fro, had wandered. His would be,
He said, the dearly grateful task, to lead
The camel by its halter, lest mishaps
Of any kind might, unperceived, befall
The heavenly precious freight the animal bore.
Ever at hand he wished to be, to help
Should help or aid be needed. So it was.

That kinsman's grief, at parting, be untold ;
His tears, his hopes to meet them once again
(Hopes which were ne'er fulfilled) ; untold the long
And weary hours of travel, ere they reached
The summit of the ridge that overhangs
The Gulf of Akaba ; untold the curves
And devious turns which led them to the high
Dread table-lands on which Mount Sinai stands,
With all his brother peaks in distance far.

They reached the spot in time to view the sun
Sinking behind those awful mountain tops
Where high Jehovah first promulged his law,
'Midst thunder, lightning, and dread trumpets clang,
Before a prostrate nation, struck with awe !

How different in the distance looked those peaks
That evening : softest tints of lilac hue,
And softly pencilled outlines, made them seem
Like mountains of enchantment. Mary gazed,
Enraptured, at the scene in silence long,
And said, at last, as if in musing lost :
" The thunders of the law have past and gone,
The thunder, and the lightning, and the gloom,
The slaughter of the people and the blood,
And Sinai hangs, above those western hills,
Steeped in celestial beauty."

Then 'gan the busy scene of pitching tents
And setting the encampment for the night.
Then shouts were heard, and the shrill Arab laugh,
Mingled with neigh of steeds, and donkey's voice,
And bleat of sheep resounding o'er the steep.
Behold a thousand camels gathered there !
Behold the horsemen reining up their steeds !
See how, from chaos, method gradually dawns,
And from confusion, order ! Camels kneel
And yield their heavy burdens ; donkey's pause
And shake their ears with pleasure when they stand ;
Women unroll their canvas of goat hair,
So dark in hue, to form the sheltering tent ;
There, swarthy men, with mallets in their hands,
Rush to and fro, to drive the pegs and stakes,
And, soon, tent after tent, rose here, rose there,
Concentrically ranged : a busy scene !

Whilst winding up the steep, the Virgin's beast
Was followed by a sumpter camel strong,
Laden with tent and all thereto pertaining.

The caravan as yet was wrapt in sleep,
All save its watchers and some sentinels.
The morning star had not yet risen above
The summit of Mount Seir, when Joseph, moved
By the deep thoughts within him, rose, and roamed

With wandering steps, the desert. Westward then
He journeyed, many a mile, along the black
And melancholy flint-stones, like a man
Whom his own meditations bear along,
Unmindful of the roughness of the way,
Unfrightened by its solitude and gloom.
The Pentateuch was present to his mind,
And each of its five wonder-books 'gan roll
Down his vast memory, like the mountain streams,
The five, loud-roaring, mountain streams, that foam
Adown Mount Blanc, to one who wanders forth,
Ere sunrise, through the vale of Chamouni.

At last he paused and turned. The far seen tents
Loomed dimly through the distance; not a sound
From all those canvas dwellings reached his ear.
And lo! within the houseless wilderness
He found himself, now, for the first time, all
Alone. Almost beneath his feet, uprose,
With woful lamentations, a great bird,
Which, wailing as it went, with race-horse speed,
Swept out of sight across the desert lands,
And disappeared beneath the glimmering stars.

"Behold," he cried "the wondrous camel-bird,
The racer of the desert. Nevermore

Will it return to visit its warm eggs,
Or brood them into life."

Then many a text,
From prophet's page or holy psalmist's scroll,
Passed flashing through his brain, causing the gloom
Around him, instantly, to disappear;
As though, with phosphorescent ink, the air
Should, by some magic power, be written upon,
Gladding the gazer's eye with glistening words
Of poesy, unlooked for, unexpected.

Turning again to eastward, he beheld
The morning star, bright-rising, o'er Mount Seir;
Vant-courier of the sun, sent, torch in hand,
To tell the world a brighter star behind him
Was travelling up in pomp,—the Lord of Day,—
To lighten joy-struck nations.

Then back he strode, all strengthened. As he
neared

The caravan, the camp was all astir;
The canvas city 'gan to disappear;
Camels were kneeling to receive their loads,
Horsemen were dashing to and fro; and all
The encampment, thoroughly aroused,
Erelong would be equipped for journeying.

The Virgin, dressed in garb of heavenly blue,
Stood, like a veiled angel, by the spot
Where had been pitched her tent the night before,
Much wondering why her guardian lingered thus
When all things spoke of travel. Suddenly
She saw him striding o'er the flinty ground,
Like one who fears he may arrive too late.
She held the Infant Saviour in her arms.
That Presence spread a glory round her form,
And sanctified her presence to his eye,
And made her seem angelic. Much they said.
She told Him her fears, her mix'd emotions,
Her dread of Herod, and, in the distance,
Of that land so dark—that mystic Egypt,—
The same unsolved enigma then as now.
He also told her much, in shortest time ;
He told her of his early morning walk,
Before the star of day had risen above
The mountains ; all his thoughts, his longings ; all
His wish to wander o'er the ways forlorn
His ancestors had wandered forty years ;
His meeting with the wondrous camel-bird,
And how she fled away. Such communings
Before departure for an unknown bourne

Are ever full of interest, like the talk
Which ardent Christians, knowing life is short,
Hold by the wayside, whispering, glowing, trembling,
And cheering up each other's answering hearts.





CANTO II.

MOUNT SINAI.

THE evening that beneath dread Sinai's mount
The caravan arrived and pitched its tents,
All hearts were moved, for all had heard reports,
However vague and dim, of great events
Which, ages gone, had happened on that spot,
And made it, to high memories, consecrate.
The Virgin's heart was full, and Joseph's too ;
Whilst strange, unusual feelings thrilled their souls,
And bore them on emotion's rising tide.
On thought they feasted, not on mortal food.
And when the lamps were lit within the tents,
Joseph, like one inspired, began to tell
Of what had happened in the former days ;
Narrating, in his own familiar words
And style of thought, what Moses, in the Book
Describes in language of the olden times,—
Holy, but hard, e'en then, to understand.

How vividly, as thus he spake, events
And incidents, all in their proper sequence,
Evolved themselves within the listener's brain.
For Joseph gave a clear epitome,
Short, but complete, of what, within the Book,
Is spread o'er many pages. Mary saw
In vision clear what had before seemed dim ;
As when a traveller through Egyptian scenes,
Coming on ruins of some ancient pile,
Karnak or Luxor, sees a labyrinth
Of structures intricate, confused, involved,
Knows not what he beholds. But should a man
Familiar with the spot show him a stand-point
From which to view it, soon a tangled maze
Clears up and settles in a picture true,
In proper order placed. So now to her
What once had been a labyrinth became
A luminous panorama. Following thus
The guidance of the Book, he told the whole,
Until the history grew more dark and sad.
But when she saw the Leader, treading down
The mount, with the two Tables in his hands,
And pausing at the spot where Joshua stood ;
And when the latter said, in deep amaze :

“Hark to the noise of war within the camp,”
And Moses answered mournfully: “Oh, no,
It is the voice of those that sing, I hear”;
When Moses saw the calf, and saw them dance,
And wax’d so hot in anger, that he cast
The Tables from his hands and brake them there
In wrath beneath the mount; then Mary wept,—
For bitter grief she wept,—for burning shame,—
For never had she realized before
How heinous was the act, how base, how foul!

But oh! the awful scene which followed then!
That she had read the awful scene before,
Or heard it read; that like a dismal dream
That casts its shadow o’er her blooming soul;
E’en as a floating vulture casts its shade
Across the surface of a quiet lake,
But, being past, the lake reflects again
Only the graceful clouds and root-hung trees,
The floating butterflies and downward flowers;—
The prey-bird quite forgot—this may have been;—
But not so now. Now Horror grew alive!

Joseph then rose and stood before her there,
And said: “With horror hast thou seen the depth
To which poor human nature sometimes sinks—

A depth terrific—harrowing to the soul
To one who first beholds it—dreary, dismal.
And next—and this most awful of the two—
Thou shudder'st at the thought that God—thy
God—

Should issue that dread mandate to destroy!
'T is not for us to fathom His decrees;
Too deep are they for our poor mortal ken.
But one thing surely we may note and ponder—
The Corner-stone of all our polity,
Of all our whole heathen structure—that
Which separates us from all heathen creeds
The whole world o'er—the unity of God,
The Godhead's unity! Was it not bitter
To make a dread example thus, and strike
Terror in all who, in their inmost souls,
Might hide a secret love for foul idolatry?
Better that some misguided wretches thus
Should be bereft of life, than that a whole
Nation, the chosen seed, the exemplar race,
Should be corrupted in the very bud?
Belief in One, one only God! Behold
The heart, the brain, the life-blood of our faith!”

BOOK XI.
THE DESERT.
(*Continued.*)



CANTO I.

THE TORRID CALM.

LEAVING the foot of Sinai with the dawn,
They kept the rocky track monotonous.
Sometimes fresh breezes cooled the desert air;
But other times there were, when torrid calms
Oppressed each breathing thing with furnace heat,
Causing them all to faint and stagger on,
As if each sickening hour would prove their last.
And when the evening came, the setting sun
Sank like a blood-red ball of molten fire,
And so rose. Seldom were seen around him
Those golden palaces of shifting cloud
Which mark his advent and his exit here.
Both the two twilights failed—the one which comes
Before the day-star gilds the Orient,
As well as that which gradual ushers in
Dark-hooded night.

So passed successive days ;

Nor were those days all blank and imageless,
Like the dull sands they trod on. Souls like theirs
Rise ever upon wafting psyche wings.
Thus journeying, the Virgin's crystal mind,
Like some polluted pool which images,
Not only heaven's high vault and the sun's orb,
But every wafting wing and every tree,
Each rock upon the brink, each tiny flower,—
The Virgin's mind, I say, took them all in,
And, in reflecting, beautified them too.
Such magic mirror daily I behold.
It is a pond delved down, by miner's toil,
In search of ore, and fed by undersprings ;
With sloping banks and hanging trees above,
And soils of varying tints adown the sides.
But oh ! such mirroring !
Each pictured slope, inverted in the pool,
Forms a true angle with the real one,
But much more beautiful ; and every flint—
Which seems but dull white pebble on the slope,—
Below the wave, glittering like diamond,
And twinkling in the breezlet, charms the eye.

Once she expressed herself to Joseph thus :
“ It gives me joy whilst in the bloom of youth

To view God's glorious world, on every side,
In all its aspects—ocean, lake, and land ;
These desert wastes, and cities great and small ;
To mark things new, and old things e'er they fall ;
And view the rainbow crest of coming change
Capping the billowy waves of Time's vast sea.
And this the barren desert. Everywhere
As on a page I read things strange and new,
In characters impressed by God's own hand."





CANTO II.

THE SAND STORM.

NOW their way lay through dry and burning
sands,

Sands deep and yielding, stretching out immense,
Farther than eye could reach. For many hours
The patient beasts toiled wearily along,
The sun's rays ever beating fiercely down
More hot and suffocating. All the guides
Grew anxious; and the sand still deeper grew,
Drier and looser. "If a storm should rise!"

Thus it continued till it lacked an hour
Of noon, when fitful breezes from the south
And far southwest began to stir the air
And move the lightest sand,—when, all at once,
Their Leader started, as from revery,
Shaded his eyes with his o'erarching hand,
And gazed, with piercing and uneasy look,
To windward, as he spied some danger there.

As when at sea a vessel often glides

Over a surface little roughed by wind,
While, a few furlongs off, tall ships are seen
Tossing upon an agitated sea,
So from that spot of calm did they behold
Dim moving objects, near the horizon's verge,
Monstrous in bulk and spectral in their aspect.
Columns they were of lifted, desert sand,
Borne up and onward by the force of winds,
Careering in a wild and frantic dance,
But ever drawing nearer. All the host
Halted in sudden terror of the blasts,
Some, trembling, dropped upon their knees; while
others,

Maddened with fright, rushed off with frenzied speed:
"Down!" cried the Leader of the caravan;
"Crouch to the earth and cover close your mouths!
To breathe that air is death!" They all obeyed.

On came the monstrous pyramids of sand,
Twisting and writhing, whirling round each other
In mad gyrations, but still striving on,
Swooping upon them; even now they feel
The arrowy driving of the loosened sands
That heralded their coming.

Lo! a pause;

The columns, checked by some invisible might,
Halt, waver, change their course, and scud away
Slanting across the desert. They are saved!

As Alpine pilgrims, who from early dawn,
Have toiled along the savage Simplon pass,
Have toiled all day, and reached, at shut of Eve,
Locarus' beauteous lake, through all the night
Dream of the dangers they have passed by day,—
Of cataracts dashing near the rugged path,
Of packs of howling wolves, and slides of rock,
That, crashing from the mountain overhead,
Plunge thundering in the yawning gulfs beneath;
And, shuddering, start awake; then dream again;—
So fared our desert wanderers that night.

But as those pilgrims, in the gladsome morn,
Sail forth to view the Borromean Isles,
The Mother Isle, the Isle of Fishermen,
And peerless Isola Bella, first of all,
What happiness is theirs! How they inhale
The scent of orange groves across the lake;
And view the gardens mirrored in the flood,
With all their golden orchards dancing there;
And the voluptuous palace by the shore,
High tow'ring o'er the palace in the lake.

They land, they mount the terraces, the ten ;
They chant, they laugh, they shout for very joy.
Their guide informs them, how the Islet once
Was a rude pile of rough and shapeless rock,
Transfigured since by magic touch of art
Into a fragment sweet of fairy-land ;
“ Where death can never enter (says the man)
From the other side of the Alps—where death and
pain

And misery are absent evermore.”
And then, for holy joy, the Alpman weeps,
And gazes over at the Mother Isle,
And views the cottages around the lake,
The terraced hills, and, higher up, the woods,
And higher still and farther back, the peaks,—
The icy Alpine peaks, he knows so well,—
All blazing in the radiant morning sun.
Thus felt our sand-wayfarers on that morn.

Slowly they wound their way round heaps of sand,
Much saddened by the dreary prospect round,
And panting all with heat. Their way was lost ;
The shifting sands had quite erased the track ;
O'er the whole region crept a dismal haze
Which hid the sun from view. Eve came and went

Bringing no golden splendor in the west ;
Night came and showed no stars. Their way was
lost,

Or only guessed at vaguely. In the dark,
Not knowing east from west, or north from south,
They were compelled to pause and pitch their tents,
Finding no fuel near to light their fires,
Nor twig, nor camels' dung, so that their lights
Were few and scant ; such fires as they could make
Being composed of fagots of dry sticks
Found in the rear among the baggage trains.

Dismal enough for most, less dismal far
For those whose souls were lighted from within,
Whose hopes were high, whose youthful blood was
warm,

Whose minds, or young or old, were stored with
thought,

And active in their working. Joseph lit
The Virgin's cheerful lamp and placed it on
The table, overspread with written scrolls,
The books of early days. Not bound like ours,
Nor beautified by pictures fair to view,
Nor like the illuminated manuscripts
Which formed the pride of mediæval times,

But simple rolls, with written characters.
But even these were dear to Joseph's eye.
Such books as ours, appealing to the eye,
And ear, and pleasing the delighted brain,
Had been to him most charming. E'en as it was,
A roll of parchment or papyrus near him,
He thought the writer's spirit near him too ;
And, even when alone, felt not alone.
He glanced upon the sleeping, silent scrolls,
And then upon the living forms beside them,
And said within himself : " Those tell of these.
Behold the illustrations of the Book,
A living picture from the Book of Books :
Its scope, its theme, its spirit, and its end—
The Virgin and the Child."

* * * * *





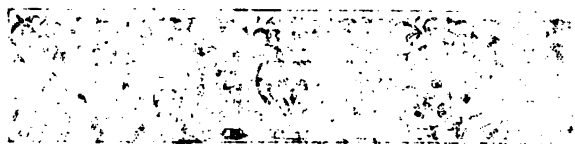
CANTO III.

THE OASIS.

NO moon, no stars, the same all-shrouding haze ;
The few lights in the camp are burning dim
And faint, But hark ! the sound of musical bells ;
Afar ? Yea, so far off it scarcely strikes
The drum of the ear. Yes, 't is the sound of bells !
The caravan is waking. Birds appear,
Sweet garden birds, not savage birds of prey
Such as one sees upon the desert. Ha !
A brace of playful antelopes, not like
Those we have looked on lately : little bells
Hang from their necks ; they seem not much afraid ;
Now they are tripping southward. Beautiful !

“ Some oasis must surely be quite near !
Southward we move ; we see some curls of smoke,
Such as mount up when fragrant woods are burnt
On altar or on hearthstone. Bells again
Saluting golden sunshine !





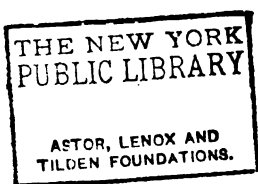
CANTO III.

THE OASIS

NO more bonfires, the sun and moon gaze
The few lights in the camp are but a gleam
And I find, 'Tis but the sound of many a rise
Alar? No, so far off it scarcely strikes
The drum of the car. Yes, 'tis the secret roll
The caravan is wakened. Birds appear
Sweet garden birds, not savage birds of prey
Such as one sees upon the desert. Ha!
A brace of playful antelopes, not like
Those we have looked on lately: birds be-
lieve them, their necks; they seem to dance
tripping southward. Hear! the
camels must surely be quivering
we see some and hear some
when fragrant odours exhale
from the arthenae. Behold them
the cousin!



"Yukon Indians, passing over the snow
on sleds. Indian puppers come to meet us."



Ha! youthful riders, prancing o'er the sands,
On sleek Arabian palfreys come to meet us.
Thanks to the God of heaven and earth, of sea
And land, we shall have water soon, fresh founts,—
We shall have rest, and sleep beneath the palms."

Then did those riders on fleet Arab steeds
Pilot the caravan to its resting-place
Where bloomed the oasis amid the sands.
On all sides, all around it, gleamed those sands,
Save one—and that was formed of loftiest peaks
And crags and precipices towering high ;
Which whoso scaled, by dint of rock-cut stairs,
And ladder upon ladder, reaching up
Into the clouds, could view that far-famed sea
So often mentioned in the Holy Book.
Its ruling prince was Loroander named.
On the tall mountain top was a deep lake
Of whose existence long no mortal knew.
'T was without outlet—fed by under springs,
And sleeping black and silent 'neath the crags,
When the wise prince, who, in some wandering,
Had come upon that strange and lonely tarn,
Brought workmen, hewed an outlet through the
rocks,

And made the drowsy waters all alive ;
Thence flowed the stream that kept the sweet place
 green

And checked the crawling sands and kept them off.

Its prime was when the Saviour sojourned there.
By this same stream, and many a deep-dug well,
The place was so well watered that it bloomed
As if by magic. Sweeter, more enchanting,
It was to look at and to dwell upon,
Than was that sand-surrounded isle of yore,
So long renowned in antique poesy.
But now no vestige of the spot remains
To tell the enchantment of its prime.
A thousand acres formed its cirque complete,
Or more or less—for Poesy keeps not
Her chain and compass, measuring metes and
 bounds.

Its outlines were all curves ; no corner-stone
Was needed where the rule of beauty reigned.
Nor were its sweet dimensions aye the same ;
Sometimes the wave, sometimes the shifting sand ;
Determined—till at last, its life complete,
The sands came sweeping on and swallow'd it.
But we, for want of space, must leave untold

The wonders of that green spot 'mid the sands :
The curious church which Loroander built,
Its water organ and its zodiac ;
The curious emblem on wall and altar.
Twelve minor temples sweetly link'd together
And all dependent on the mother church ;
His plan to marry science and religion
In closest wedlock, thus enriching both
And giving them a double power o'er man.
Three days they tarried in that oasis
And then the leader gave command to start,
And on they journeyed slowly to the sea.



BOOK XII.

EGYPT.



CANTO I.

THE SUBMERGED CITY.

TWO hours before the dawn, a heavenly dream
Came down on Joseph's spirit. He beheld
An angel, fresh from heaven, who said: "Arise,
And go to Mary's tent, and softly call,
And bid her also rise and be prepared
To travel e'er another hour shall come."

Obedient to the vision, Joseph rose
And did e'en as the dream commanded. When
The hour had run its destined round, again
He visited her tent and found her risen—
She and the Child—all ready quite for travel.

With him had entered, unperceived at first,
The angel visitant, who, gleaming forth,
E'en as the sun gleams from a muffled cloud,
Appeared the same he had beheld in sleep,

"All hail, Thou Blessed Mother of the Christ!
Come with me, thou and Joseph—quickly come."

The encampment was all wrapt in deepest sleep ;
No eye beheld them as they moved along,
Slow pacing toward the beach. With joy they found
A boat awaiting them, both light and strong.
They soon were floating on the open sea.
Spontaneously their mingled voices rose
In an old holy song, well known to all
Whoe'er have loitered by Siloe's brook,
Or listened to the chants on Olivet.

A heavenly glory,

Sweeter than that which ushers in the dawn,
Or that which softly creeps across the world
'Twixt sunset and the coming of the stars,
Encircled them. Behind his Virgin Mother
Stood the Holy Child ; the foster-father
Reclining at His feet. On they floated,
Angels above them, angels at the prow ;
The Child full often uttering such sweet words
As only Infant Godhead could outlisp.

So on they slowly glided, till the orb
Of the ever punctual day-star 'gan appear,
And sunlit they floated ever westward.
When lo ! beneath them, deep beneath the wave,
Appeared a submerged city. Wonderful



*Behind His Virgin Mother
Shed the Holy Child - The Father
Working at His feet.*

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It was to mark those ruined structures old,
Those crumbled walls and bastions; those remains
Of former glory, sunken, whelmed beneath
The undulating waters. How they shook
Beneath the slightest ripple on the surface,
Refracted and reflected and convulsed
In never-ceasing motion—dead, all dead!
No one could tell the city's name or story.
Some said, in ancient days, before the flood,
The sins enormous, deeds of hideous guilt
Committed daily, nightly, 'neath those towers,
Had called the vengeance of high heaven upon it,
And made it what it was. A legend told
How, many years ago, a diver bold
(He was from Oman Sea, and had been trained
To diving after pearls) had gone below
And brought a vase of porcelain from the deep
So costly and so brilliant, so informed
With radiant hues and pictures strange and rare,
That the poor diver grew a wealthy man
And built him a rich palace and became
The friend of lordly princes in the land;
Until, an earthquake coming, house and grounds
Were swallowed up in ruin.

Ever since,
So ran the legend, none have ever dared
To dive again in search of precious things
Among those ghostly bastions. And they say
That oft, in stormy nights, when winds are loud,
The sound of harp and viol has been heard,
Mingled with dash of billows, as if men
And maidens were engaged in revel there.

At length the Holy Child, sinking to sleep,
The Mother sang this soothing lullaby—

THE VIRGIN'S LULLABY.

Sink, sink to sweet slumber, Thou Holiest Child !
The danger is past and the hurricane wild.
Those columns that swept o'er the desolate land
Have fled or are broken ; each tall shaft of sand
Has been turned from its course by the wave of Thy
Hand.

So, in ages to come, shall the onsets of sin
Be vanquished, be conquered, be scattered apace,
By the power of Thy Word and the gift of Thy Grace.
Then slumber Thou sweetly until close of day ;
The danger is over, the fear, the dismay—
The Demons that threatened have all passed away !

* * * * *



CANTO II.

HELIOPOLIS.

THEY reached an antique city, old and dim,
Where prostrate obelisks and shafts appeared,
And broken colonnades, and ruined courts,
And hoary structures,—smitten by decay ;
Relics of former greatness. Mix'd with these,
Green gardens, hanging on tall terraces
(The work of art), were seen ; and lofty palms,
And fair acacia trees, and emerald lawns,
And various vegetation. Around the skirts
Of the old city streets appeared, composed
Of rude mud hovels, or of wattled reeds,
The homes of generations then alive,
Who nestled as they could around the fanes
And structures built long centuries before,
Which in the Book is called the city of On,
And by the Greeks great Heliopolis.
There Joseph, in the Patriarchal days

Which Scripture tells of, took, with joy, to wife
Great Potiphara's daughter ; high-priest he,
And she the greatest lady in the land.
There, doubtless, they were married. There, for, rest
And recreation, Joseph oft retired,
From all the bustle of the Memphian court,
Its pomps and festivals, to meditate
Among the sacred groves and quiet shrines,
Where learning sat enthroned from age to age.

Led by their angel guide, the wanderers
Were left upon the temple's marble roof.

* * * * *

That night the great high-priest of On beheld
A vision which appeared three times to him,
And which, in substance, was the same in each.
In each the same celestial messenger
Appeared before him in a dream, and said :
" Arise, Piramis, by the break of day,
And mount thee to the lofty temple roof.
There thou shalt see three stranger-visitors
From Palestine. Receive them courteously ;
Treat them most kindly ; fugitives are they
From cruel Herod." Thereupon the dream
Showed him, as in a magic mirror, all

The three, so faithfully and vividly
Portrayed that, had he seen them with his eyes,
The impression had not been more strong and true.
The last time that he dreamed the dream he rose
And donned his priestly garments all complete ;
And, all alone, he traced the well-known way
Until he reached a spiral flight of stairs,
Up which, with beating heart, he slowly trod.

As when, behind some lofty eastern hill,
Orion rises up with all his stars,
Star glittering after star, till, all complete,
The constellation hangs above the woods
In autumn, when the air is keen with frost.
So shone the high priest's figure and his robes,
When, having mounted the last steps, he stood
All radiant on the roof, before their eyes,
And scanned them. When he found his thrice-seen
dream

Embodied firm in flesh and blood, he knew
That all was ordered by the Will Supreme,
And bowing lowly, almost to the roof,
He cried : " All hail, ye Holy visitors !
Welcome to Egypt ! God has sent ye hither !
An angel in a dream has told me of you.

All Hail! Thou Mother of that Glorious Child!
Here thou may'st find, for Him and for thyself,
Sure shelter and protection, home and rest.

As when some rapt astronomer beholds
The passage of a strange, magnetic storm
Across the solar disk, he knows full well
That, at that very moment, round the earth
And through it, passes a mysterious thrill;
That thousand needles quiver o'er the globe,
Trembling in unison and ecstasy;
That all along the shadowy cone of night
Auroras glorious to behold, are seen,
Blazing and fading, fading, blazing up,
At either pole, with coruscations grand;
And that through all the planetary spheres
A vibratory shivering hurries on
Thought-quick. So then, the Egyptian Hierophant,
Reflecting on all he had seen and heard,—
The dreams which he had dream'd concerning
 them,
And all of strange that had foretold their advent,—
Knew there was something, deep and wonderful,
Therewith connected, which he could not fathom.
The man, he knew, was real flesh and blood;

A man from head to heel, a glorious man,
 Unlike all other men he e'er had seen,—
 But still a man !
 The woman, of all women he had met,
 Seemed loveliest, purest, most unspotted, best,—
 Yet still a woman, sprung from womankind,
 Not a fair angel wafted from the skies.
 And yet—and yet—he knew not what to think !
 “ That Glorious Child ”—thus said he to himself,
 “ Can He be mortal ? Whence that wondrous
 sheen ?
 And oh ! those eyes, those wondrous, wondrous
 eyes,
 What mean they by their Holy-of-holies gleam ?
 What means that lambent lustre round His limbs,
 The influence which streams from forth His form,
 And beautifying all that it shines upon ? ”
 “ Come thou along with me,” Piramis said,
 “ And I will show you what part of the building
 You may consider all your own, the whilst
 You are my honored guests.”
 They went with him,
 Until at last he led them out upon
 What seemed a hanging garden. So it was.

A garden hanging airily aloft,
On arches, high supported. It was
A sweet, retired spot, with shadowy trees
And seats of rustic workmanship supplied.

“All this, my friends, consider as your own,
And use them as you will.” Then their kind host
Conducted them around their new abode,
And, pointing out the objects on each side,
Told them the name of each, its history
And all that was remarkable about it.
He once had travelled in the Holy Land
And understood the language Joseph spake.
Thus having spoken, the Hierophant took leave.
Joseph and Mary, wrapt in thought, sat long
On that o’erhanging terrace. “Even so,”
Said Mary, gazing on the scene like one
Absorbed in meditation ; “all I see
Looks strange and weird and all unlike the world
That we were born in. Hark ! I hear the sound
Of a wild music, coming from below,
Like choristers intoning sacred hymns.
And now, down looking from this giddy height,
I see two long processions passing o’er
A spacious court-yard, chanting as they go

In strophe and antistrophe. How loud
The clang of cymbals ever and anon
Rings through the halls and echoing corridors!"

"I see them," answered Joseph, "hear them too;
And all we see and hear informs the mind
That we are destined for some time to come
To pass our time amid these priestly fanes,
These sacerdotal colleges and shrines,
Where we shall witness other rites than those
Which God taught Moses on the sacred mount.
Almost my courage fails me when I think
How often we shall pant for our own land
And all we love so deeply, warmly there."





CANTO III.

THE WORKSHOP.

THUS communed they, glancing round, far and near,

And noting all they saw of new or strange.

With thoughtful hospitality, their host
Provided all things needful for their home.

Soon Joseph built him there a workshop,
And furnished it with all a workshop needs.
Behold him planing, sawing, working there;
Hear how his hammer, as he drives a nail,
Keeps time to some old tune. How sweet
The smell of cedar and of sandalwood,
Perfuming all the shop. And Mary oft
There takes her favorite seat—skilful she
In executing rich embroidery
With gold or silver. And the Boy Divine
Or plays with a small hammer by himself,
Or gathers blocks of wood to build aloft
His tiny palaces or pyramids.

And as the workshop of the foster-sire,
So in one corner of the shop itself
A smaller one was fashioned, in the which
A little chest there was to hold such tools
(Though blunt their edge) as His small hand could
wield.

So He had something now to make, to mould ;
Something to fashion with His own small fingers,
As He aforetime, ere His powers were veiled
Beneath the helpless figure of an infant,
Had fashioned all creation. Mystery
Of mysteries ! We cannot fathom thee !
Enough to show how Joseph taught the Child,
And how the God came daily brightening forth.

* * * * *

Five years have passed. One day Piramis sent
A messenger, to know if they could see him ;
He found them in the workshop ; one at work
Planing a board ; one sewing, close at hand ;
The young Child busy with his wonted tools,—
And altogether forming such a scene
Of industry, of innocence and beauty,
That he, the visitor, beholding it, was charmed
Beyond expression. Then the high-priest

Noted how much the Wonderful Boy had grown,
How much He had developed in His powers
Since he had seen Him last. "The light within,"
He added, "will in proper time break forth
And gladden all the world. Perhaps the event
May prove more slow and gradual than we expect,
And I, for one, most probably, shall die
Before the great salvation shines abroad,
Enlightening all the nations." Joseph said:
"No one can tell. 'T is ours to watch and wait,
And do our duty whilst we live on earth,
Leaving the great event to Him, whose power
Disposes all things after His own will.
We cannot lift the veil. 'T is ours to work,
'T is ours to watch and wait, to watch and work."
With due obeisance then the high-priest went.
It was the last time they should see each other;
Though neither knew that it would prove the last.





CONCLUSION.

MORE glorious night ne'er visited the earth,
Except the Night of Nights, when He was
born.

Spring odors from all gardens filled the air
With perfume. Rainbows, both of sun and moon,
Played arching o'er each cataract round the globe;
Sweet thunder-peals resounded; cooings sweet
Of ring-doves in all woods; and from beyond
The dreamy moon, beyond the twinkling stars
A carillon of dulcet silver bells
By angels rung in New Jerusalem,
With choral voices mix, and saintly psalms,
Went thrilling through creation's vast expanse.

All at once

The Angel of the Annunciation stood
Before the spotless pair and said: "All hail!
Blessed art thou among women, Holy Mary!
I come to tell most joyous news to you—
Joyous to you and all the nations round.

Herod, the bloody tyrant, who pursued you
With foul intent to slay the Infant Christ,
Is dead, is dead ; and now you may return
In perfect safety to the Holy Land."





AVE MARIA.

A PANORAMIC GLANCE INTO HISTORY.

LONG Centuries have passed! Behold a band
Of pilgrims, footing reverently a plain,
Who, sometimes pausing, pointed to a hill
On which a grand cathedral stood in pride,
Above the midland sea. Behold yon mighty pile!
Within it, in its centre, just beneath
The cupola, there stands a holy house,
Not large in size, or sumptuous in itself,
But prized as holy, 't is most holy called.
Legend shall tell how in that homesome house
The Holy Mother did abide. Furthermore,
Tradition shall relate how angels bore it
O'er sea and land and placed it in that spot—
Thenceforth a place of pilgrimage, the most
Renowned on earth. Erelong the holy house,
For all its plainness, shall be cased in marble;
And yon cathedral shall arise above it.

All for the sake of that plain house—the heart,
The salient point of all its rapid growth—
Monarchs shall bow in adoration there,
And jewelled queens shall worship—queens and beg-
gars.

A hundred thousand pilgrims every year
Shall visit it, each pilgrim with a gift.

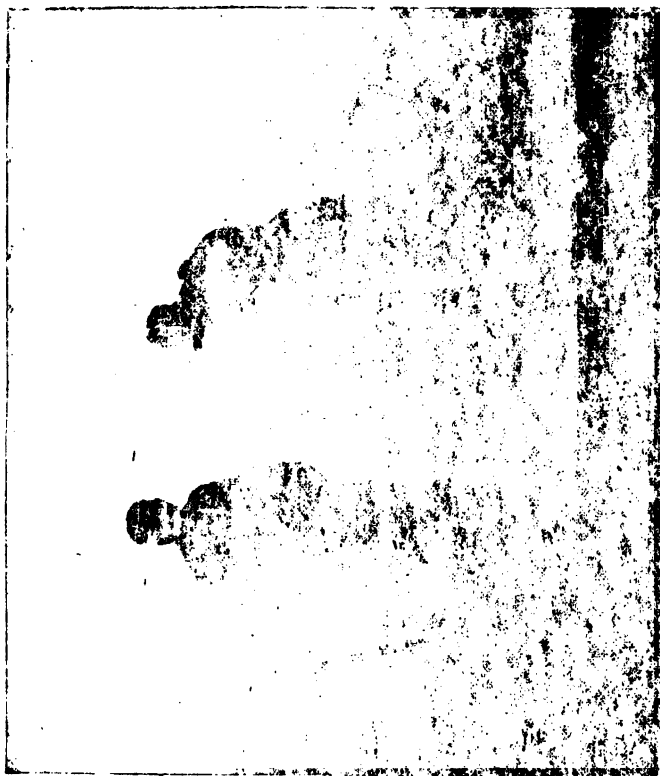
Behold again! See pass in sequence slow,
With music moving, many a pictured scene.
Here, pilgrims to our Lady of the Snow
Move upward, bearing boughs of evergreen;
There, mariners Sicilian, storm o'erhead,
Seem drifting near the shores of Stromboli.
Flames, through the darkness flash, all fiery red,
And lava floods are rolling to the sea.
Then sailors, panic-stricken might be heard
Singing this anthem, sounding cheerily,
As if sweet rescue came with every word:

“O Sanctissima! O Purissima!
Dulcis Virgo Maria!
Mater amata, intemerata,
Ora, ora pro nobis!”

Another picture! Different this from all!
 On the wild outskirts of Carpathian hills
 A wondrous excavation still exists,
 In which no ray of sunshine ever shone.
 Full fifteen hundred feet below the soil
 The excavation reaches. Magic scene!
 Mark there a thousand columns cut from salt!
 See passages, see alleys, how they cross!
 See the main hall on crystal pillars borne,
 With chandeliers high hanging from the roof,
 And every visitor with torch in hand!
 Those workmen! how they clamber up yon steps,
 Cut in hard rocksalt! Others, climbing, see,
 On airy ladders, running up and down!
 A fairy spot it seems, deep underground.
 No one could tell when the great sun sinks down,
 Did not yon timepiece tell it, set in salt.
 'T is sunset now! Hark to the punctual clock!
 Hark to the ponderous bell announcing it
 Through all those nether regions!
 Instant the whole barathrum seems a church,
 Lit up for vespers, hymning Mary's name:
 "Ave Maria! Ave Maria purissima!
 Ora, ora pro nobis!"

Look up, look up ! Romantic Switzerland
Is all before thee. See ! as evening comes,
How all those distant mountains to the west
Blush rosy red ; how Jungfrau, through her veil
Of vapor, shows her vestal face ; how yonder lake,
Beneath a purpling cloud, is giving back
The glow of coming sunset ; how a flush
Of crimson tinges every wave, and rock, and tree ;
And every lifted oar and every sail ;
And every shepherd lass with scarlet cap ;
And every shepherd boy with rosy cheek ;
Making the red look ruddier, and the pale
Turn red ; and painting e'en the shadow'd rocks
With deeper, fuller, richer coloring !
See how yon cataract, which touches ground
Near the lake's margin, sends adown the wave
Its long inverted image, flowing up
E'en as the first flows downward. Magic scene !

But hark ! the vesper bell ! The sun has sunk
Behind yon far-off peak ; the fisherman
Is in his harboring cove, and drops his oar
To pray ; the shepherd drops his Alpine horn
To cross himself and pray.
Two lovers, strolling on the pebbly shore,



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Cease looking at each other, look aloft—
 Their hands divided, not their hearts—to pray.
 And yon stout chamois hunter, on the peak,
 The loftiest human object now in sight,—
 Yea, almost hid from sight,—drops bow and shaft,
 And kneels him on the dizzy height, to pray:
 “Ave Maria Sanctissima!
 Ora, ora pro nobis!”

My task is done! If aught has dropt my pen
 Unworthy my high theme, forgive me, Lord!
 Forgive an erring mortal! Bless all lands!
 Thy will on earth be done, as in the heavens!
 Thine be dominion, power, and utmost glory
 Through all eternity! Forgive! Forgive!

THE END.





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